

Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy

Response prepared by AMES Australia
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Introduction

AMES Australia is an autonomous adult education institute accountable to the Victorian Minister for Training and Skills. The organisation provides a comprehensive range of initial settlement support, English language and literacy tuition, vocational training and employment services to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Sydney.

Newly arrived adult refugees and migrants are unfamiliar with the Australian workforce context and a significant number require access to VET to gain first employment in Australia.

AMES welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Skills for Victoria's Growing Economy Review. The Review is being undertaken at a time when the Commonwealth Government has also announced reforms to the vocational education and training sector designed to better respond to industry training needs with a focus on technology, health care and construction. The announcement of the Government's 'Job Maker' plan on May 26, 2020 intends to increase funding transparency and performance monitoring, and better coordinate the subsidies, loans and other sources of funding to make the most of the support that is being provided. Consequently, this Review is an opportune time for the Victorian Government to advocate for increased funding to ensure that providers can sustainably provide a high-quality service that is vital for training Victorians for the jobs that businesses are looking to create. An increase in funding to Victoria's VET system is an important component in the national recovery from COVID-19.

AMES contribution to the Review is specifically focused on how the VET system can be more effective for, and inclusive of, adult culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) clients.

AMES Australia makes recommendations in 5 areas for consideration by the Review:

1. Bridging programs support learners in navigating the post-secondary system and updating their skills
2. Placing primary focus on excellence, quality, outcomes, and collaboration rather than compliance
3. Flexibility in the post-secondary system: Skill sets and contextualised, individualised learning
4. Increase funding to the VET system overall, while also reducing funding and course access barriers for vulnerable cohorts
5. The skills and capability needs of employers and the potential and aspirations of learners can be joined up through active linkages between industry and providers and learners having more avenues to experiencing workplaces and workplace culture.

CALD cohort profile

In this context AMES defines CALD individuals as those who have arrived in Australia relatively recently and have one or more of the following attributes:

- limited foundation skills including low-level English communication skills, literacy and numeracy and digital skills, some pre-literacy in first language
- overseas skills and experiences which are relevant but not easily translated, transferable and/or recognised in Australian workplaces
- limited or no Australian work experience and work-related networks
- limited or no knowledge and understanding of Australian workplace culture and systems.

The CALD cohort also includes migrants and refugees who:

- have been in Australia for a longer period and may currently be in the workforce—usually in low skilled occupations, but who continue to face barriers in accessing and completing vocational training to progress to higher-skilled opportunities
- need training to re-enter employment after losing a job.

Through its English language programs, vocational training programs, and jobactive employment services, AMES Australia has significant experience working with CALD groups and first-hand knowledge of the challenges they face in navigating and succeeding in the VET system. In 2018-19 AMES¹ delivered English language, work readiness and vocational programs under funding contracts including: 3,765 CALD clients in ACFE funded pre-accredited language programs; 1,815 clients in Skills First funded courses; 797 in Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) funded programs and 606 new arrivals in the Adult Migrant English Program.²

During the same period, AMES serviced 29,654 jobseekers of which 21% were from migrant or refugee backgrounds, almost double the average of other providers in AMES operating regions.³

Summary of Recommendations

AMES provides the Review with several recommendations that can be grouped thematically under the five key areas below. The specific questions posed in the Issues Paper are addressed in the second half this paper, from page 9.

1. Bridging programs support learners in navigating the post-secondary system and updating their skills

Some migrants and refugees come to Australia with skills and experience that can be used within a short time frame if the appropriate bridging training is available. Bridging programs are a viable option for new and recent arrivals to upskill and reach a level of work readiness.

AMES recommends a significantly increased role for bridging programs - a focused skills development program that builds from the knowledge and skills of the individual to meet the entry requirements for VET courses or leads to work roles in Australian workplaces. Bridging programs:

- provide capacity for Australians needing a supported pathway into VET
- provide capacity to undertake initial skill set training rather than restricting training to full qualifications as a first step to employment.

In the following section of this document, AMES highlights the fact that bridging programs can address the needs of a range of CALD clients' needs. Such programs can be tailored to a range of needs – from supporting the economic inclusion of refugee background women from the Horn of Africa with a program that starts with pre-accredited contextualised learning to ensure career pathways commensurate with refugee background professionals' previous experience and skills. It bears noting that our experience also shows that mentorship also can play a transformative role in bridging programs for AMES cohorts. Having an experienced guide to support a learner's navigation of learning and skills development opportunities, qualification recognition, workplace culture, and others have been demonstrated to be effective in multiple instances at AMES. Our mentors are often volunteers who speak the same language and/or are from the same cultural group as our

¹ The AMES 19/20 Annual Report is being finalized, after which more recent data will be available.

² AMES Australia 2018 -2019 Annual Report. <https://www.ames.net.au/-/media/files/corporate-documents/ames-australia-201819-annual-report-updated.pdf>

³ Based on data sourced from the Commonwealth *jobactive* performance monitoring database

clients, which further bridges the gap for clients. The expert panel that AMES convened to prepare this response identified that there is scope for the Victorian Government to further encourage the private sector to support bridging programs and mentorship through their Corporate Social Responsibility Programs.

For additional information on this recommendation, please review the responses to the following questions from the Issues Paper:

- How are you working within your local community to offer learning and employment opportunities to vulnerable Victorians? (Page 9)
- Apprenticeships/traineeships: How do you support apprentices and trainees complete their course? What other support could be offered? (Page 13)

2. Placing primary focus on excellence, quality, outcomes, and collaboration rather than compliance

There is an understandable focus on targets for completion of qualifications at federal and state level. This is driven by projections on skill shortages and the need to increase the numbers of workers with higher qualification levels. At the same time, the system must be able to accommodate the needs of individuals and businesses. Shifting the focus of VET toward achieving excellence in matching the learners' needs and potential with emerging opportunities in the labour market, the quality of teaching and learning, and using long-term learner outcomes would allow the Victorian post-secondary sector to better support Victoria's rapidly growing and changing economy.

In particular, training providers' ability to evidence delivery of high-quality, tailored, future-ready training and outcomes for learners could be actively supported through flexibility in funding and collaborative infrastructure. As an example, from a funding perspective, one approach could be to more actively fund the monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement capacity of providers. One potential way to implement this separate, targeted funding from the total value of a contact hour allocation, to be a set percentage rate of the contact hour similar to an overhead charge. Providers having the capacity to engage in regular evidence-based continuous improvement could be transformative for the sector.

Pathways are critical for our learners and take many different forms whether they are for the beginner language learner with no prior schooling experience, a disengaged young person or the skilled migrant. One organisation is not necessarily equipped or funded to provide training, services and support for the entire journey different people are undertaking. It makes sense to combine expertise into a collective client experience. Secondly, this may also facilitate a much smoother transition, one step to another, one aspect of learning to another, one organisation to another. Collaborative delivery models so that students have "a foot in each camp" could greatly assist not just the transition but also in improving service delivery as knowledge would be shared and some prior barriers could be removed. Collaboration also, then, between training providers and employers transitioning students into full employment could also be a positive step forward for all- the training provider in terms of what they are teaching, the employer in potentially having a thoroughly trained employee and the student in that employment is "guaranteed". A funding model which facilitates evidence-based data on the outcomes of such collaborations would be useful in determining future government expenditure and indicate the most effective models.

It would be beneficial to increase collaboration through shared learning activities between providers to increase quality across the sector particularly with TAFE taking a leadership role in supporting smaller, less well-resourced providers. The department could provide incentives for providers with

active monitoring, evaluation, and learning programs to establish common long-term outcome indicators and measurement tools to supplement the data currently collected by organisations like NCVER. Such an intervention could catalyse providers' ability to learn from each other's work and enable the Department to have access to additional evidence for designing policy and program interventions.

For additional information on this recommendation, please review the responses to the following questions from the Issues Paper:

- What is your experience of the Skills First reforms? How could they be consolidated into a sustainable plan for education and training? (Page 10)
- What is your experience of current regulatory processes? How could regulatory arrangements reduce red tape and promote excellence? (Page 10)
- How could governance arrangements for public education and training providers change, to reduce waste and foster greater collaboration? (Page 11)
- Learning: What could be done to improve curriculum and assessment? (Page 14)

3. Flexibility in the Post-secondary System: Skill Sets and Contextualised, Individualised Learning

AMES Australia, through its range of programs targeting CALD clients (in addition to education, settlement, employment, skilled migration, youth), has a unique understanding of the needs and aspirations of this group of Victorians. Similarly, other providers have unique expertise about other groups of Victorians.

AMES experience in providing training, particularly for newly arrived job seekers who urgently need employment, is that they will complete limited accredited training to meet employer requirements and start work as soon as possible, rather than undertaking lengthy full qualifications training before seeking work.

For those refugees or other migrants with low levels of literacy, completing a whole certificate prior to gaining employment is not realistic and is not the most effective pathway to achieving the first step into low level skilled or unskilled employment. It is equally important that training does not cease with this first step into employment and that workers are not consigned to low skilled employment in the long term.

This is not the case for all newly arrived refugees and migrants who require additional skills to gain employment, but it is the reality for some. A flexible system would ensure that qualifications could be completed in small steps as the learner has the capacity to undertake them, or as the employer requires them. The objective would still be to complete qualifications, but over a longer time frame, combined with work and other life and settlement priorities. This flexibility would also facilitate increased responsiveness in meeting the changing skill needs of industry. Moreover, providing opportunities for a contextualised approach to learning in workplace contexts has been shown to be a promising practice for many AMES clients. For instance, contextualised literacy and numeracy learning has helped AMES learners to connect to a more holistic view of how learning can link to a particular type of job, teach them the norms and values in the Australian workplace, and support other holistic settlement – as well as learning – outcomes. The case study detailed on page 18, *Teaching the 'Language of Aged Care'* provides an example of AMES approach to contextualised learning.

A culture of lifelong learning must be wide-ranging enough to include those learners who commence this continuous pathway with low levels of social and learning capital. While lifelong learning may be accessible to those who start with some qualifications and can progressively build on these (e.g. Skills Passport), it is not an opportunity that is so easily integrated into life plans for those who lack these advantages. A Skills Passport is an important mechanism to promote lifelong learning as it should have the capacity to record education and training outcomes that do not result in the issuing of a qualification, for example, the completion of VET units, as well as providing employers with a record of the skills obtained in related industries or occupations.

For refugees and migrants who arrive with low levels of formal education and little or no English, achieving a culture of lifelong learning requires entry points to training that recognise these barriers. This kind of flexibility in the system, aided by individual pathway planning and career counselling, is also noted as a means of attracting more CALD Australians to undertake formal training.

For additional information on this recommendation, please review the responses to the following questions from the Issues Paper:

- How are you working within your local community to offer learning and employment opportunities to vulnerable Victorians? (Page 9)
- Literacy and numeracy: What support do you offer students struggling with literacy and numeracy? Are pre-enrolment assessments effective? (Page 12)
- Learning: What could be done to improve curriculum and assessment? (Page 14)
- Getting a good job: How do you monitor and support your students' transition to relevant employment? What works, and what is needed? (Page 15)
- What does excellence look like for you, in post-secondary education and training? What examples of excellence exist in Victoria? (Page 17)
- What does 'work-readiness' mean to you? How do you support work-readiness for your students, and what extra support would help? (Page 18)

4. Increase funding to the VET system overall, while also reducing funding and course access barriers for vulnerable cohorts

Early investment in appropriately funded specialised vocational training approaches is recommended to maximise employment and training outcomes for new arrivals and avoid the risk of having these new arrivals disengage from training and work opportunities. In this way, significant numbers of new and recent arrivals can be transitioned into vocational training and employment with a maximum chance of success and skills contribution. Current student contact hour rates could be increased to ensure that providers are able to sustainably provide a high-quality service to meet existing and emerging job demand from Victorian employers and industries.

Government subsidy can significantly affect a student's ability to study or continue to study, in terms of having the capacity to pay. Reducing funding and course access barriers to learner pathways is an important aspect to consider. Ensuring eligibility for government-supported training and maximising career and work options through foundation and vocational training should be enabled such as a learner with a Diploma equivalent qualification, that is not supporting an employment outcome in Australia, undertaking a trade course at Certificate III when seeking a different career path or work opportunity.

For additional information on this recommendation, please review the responses to the following questions from the Issues Paper:

- Cost: How do you set course fees and communicate them to students? How are course fees affected by changing government subsidy levels? (Page 13)
- Completing: Why do students leave courses before completing? How do you support students to maximise their chances of completing? (Page 16)

5. The skills and capability needs of employers and the potential and aspirations of learners can be joined up through active linkages between industry and providers and learners having more avenues to experiencing workplaces and workplace culture

Through the range of services that AMES provides to CALD clients, we gather information related to labour market conditions and opportunities for CALD communities based on active monitoring - through industry relationships, sharing knowledge between our Education and Employment teams, and regularly gathering local area knowledge. We assess this labour market strategy to be critical to our success in post-secondary education programming. Education and training delivery that is linked in real-time with industry needs, and that also has the flexibility to be informed by and adapted to changing labour market conditions would more likely support long-term growth in Victoria's economy. Lastly, allowing students to see and learn for themselves about workplaces, as well as providing learning in workplace contexts, helps them discern their appropriate path to employment. Developing literacy and numeracy in workplace contexts has been shown to be of particular use to many of AMES newly arrived learners.

For additional information on this recommendation, please review the responses to the following questions from the Issues Paper:

- Getting a good job: How do you monitor and support your students' transition to relevant employment? What works, and what is needed? (Page 15)
- How do you predict which occupations are most in demand in your area? How do you use this information when planning your courses? (Page 9)
- What does 'work-readiness' mean to you? How do you support work-readiness for your students, and what extra support would help? (Page 18)
- How is industry involved in the delivery of education and training in your institution? What is working and what is not? (Page 18)

Summaries of AMES Australia's responses to specific questions posed in the Issues Paper

Issues for the Economy and Society

How do you predict which occupations are most in demand in your area? How do you use this information when planning your courses?

Active monitoring through industry relationships, sharing knowledge between our Education and Employment teams, and regularly gathering local area knowledge are critical to predicting occupational demand and planning our course delivery and schedules. The Industry and Client Managers on our Employment team develop knowledge and become specialists in specific industry sectors. They aggregate and synthesise information about industry requirements as well as information coming directly from employers. They focus on geographical and regional dynamics. To link this learning to our post-secondary education services, our Industry and Client Managers meet regularly with program leaders from our Education team with the goal of providing relevant programs and skills to our clients. Additionally, AMES Australia Work Brokers relay on-the-ground intelligence pertaining to industries and employers that are currently hiring and geographic areas where job vacancies exist. Lastly, to gain local area knowledge teachers scan local papers; staff belong to regional/local area networks and share information from these networks with their fellow staff, and teachers note the current occupations of students as well as any employment trends emerging from client cohorts.

How are you working within your local community to offer learning and employment opportunities to vulnerable Victorians?

AMES Australia takes a pro-active approach to “bring services to” our clients through a place-based approach rather than expecting clients to come to us. To accomplish this approach, AMES maintains sites close to many of the new and recently arrived refugee and migrant communities that we serve. Moreover, we take learning out into the community—to locations and places that are accessible to clients, for instance within schools, community centres, and shopping centres. This proximity is the starting point to build lasting relationships and trust with successive groups of new Victorians, as well as to help us to align and adapt our services to the aspirations of clients with the future needs of the Victorian economy. AMES Australia uses an applied learning model to link clients' skills and aspirations with the areas where industries have needs. For example:

Economic participation opportunities for refugee women

AMES Australia works with the local community to identify and address barriers to the economic participation of vulnerable Victorians, such as women from refugee backgrounds. As an example, AMES identified a need to support women who are beyond the early stages of resettlement, having lived in Australia for more than three years. In partnership with the Horn of Africa Communities Network (HACN), AMES undertook a consultation and co-design process with over 300 women from refugee communities from Somalia, Myanmar, South Sudan, Eritrea, Iraq, and Iran. Significant numbers of refugee women from these communities had arrived in Australia with disrupted formal education and limited vocational skills or formal work experience commensurate with opportunities within the Australian labour market.

Through the consultations, it was identified that barriers to economic participation existed for many of the women, for instance, English language proficiency and the absence of vocational training and

support programs offered at a level consistent with existing language competence. The consultation process also established three areas of vocational interest consistent across the communities: catering/food retail/hospitality; hair and beauty; and clothing/textile production.

A community-based bridging program for women from refugee backgrounds was developed and piloted at two sites, Hoppers Crossing and Kensington. The pilots were supported by trained volunteers from the Victorian volunteer community who worked with the women to enhance their English language competence, increase social confidence and assist clients to identify and clarify personal goals and outcomes. Three groups of 15 women at each site participated in the pre-accredited contextualised training delivered by qualified industry trainers. Components were added to continue to progress their pathway to economic inclusion, such as short accredited modules, work placements/internships, and microfinance. As a result, one of the sewing groups in Hoppers Crossing registered their own business name and underwent training in business planning. At Kensington, 12 women completed accredited Barista training. This localised, place-based approach to working with a vulnerable cohort of Victorians enabled the development of this successful bridging program into learning and employment.

Issues for Government

What is your experience of the Skills First reforms? How could they be consolidated into a sustainable plan for education and training?

A sustainable plan for education and training would likely require increased investment and establishing a system in which providers be categorised as “quality providers” in a certain training area which confers reduced compliance pressures. Regarding increased investment, AMES Australia believes that RTOs and LLOs have found great value in being able to anticipate which courses will garner payment from the government. However, there may still be room for improvement in how the list of courses actively adapts and aligns to client demand and the economy’s needs.

Additionally, establishing a means by which quality providers can spend less effort on compliance could allow these sector leaders to tailor their teaching and learning to their learners, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive learning outcomes for individuals, and in the aggregate more effectively meet the Victorian economy’s long-term needs. Such providers compliance is understood and demonstrated by audit performance over time and may not require as frequent, repeated short-term checking. This performance, together with demonstrated leadership in a field of training has earned the provider their Excellence status and funding could be provided on that basis for leadership to the field, advice to government, and new initiatives in service delivery. Of course, standards of compliance in regard to standards, systems, processes, and procedures would be maintained; but a more effective approach may be to foreground the delivery on quality teaching and learning; trusting excellent providers to individualise their approach to the learner, their aspirations, and the labour market demand; and measuring success using long-term outcomes.

What is your experience of current regulatory processes? How could regulatory arrangements reduce red tape and promote excellence?

To provide more detail to the previous response, excellence in the post-secondary sector could be promoted through an increased focus on measuring the quality of teaching and learning, measuring using longer-term outcomes, and promoting a system built on trusting high-quality providers. Quality in teaching and learning currently is focused on short-term outputs and outcomes, but there are examples of the suggested approach. For instance, the SEE program that provides language, literacy, numeracy training and technology skills in preparation for employment and further

education focuses on short-term outcomes such as hours completed and language progression against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). There is no means to report longer-term outcomes in the SEE online reporting system, such as increased confidence and independence, digital literacy, or whether the client got a job. In AMES experience, these are crucial long-term indicators that could be measured to promote excellence. Many SEE clients return to AMES after completing their entitled hours under SEE due to a lack of readiness to commence work. In the spirit of meeting the Victorian economy's long-term needs, it would be advisable to design and implement longer-term outcome and impact measures and use the data from those to drive training delivery to support economic growth. Measures could include: did the client get a job that is aligned with their professional plans or aspirations, how did they proceed in the negotiation for their job, did they retain their job after a period of time post-completion, did they retain a job at a higher level than prior to education, etc. Designing funding models that support quality teaching and learning outcomes would promote excellence. For instance, ensuring that current student contact hour rates are sufficiently high to allow for trainers or teachers who are best suited to teach a course, rather than models that drive down prices and increase class sizes, would meaningfully promote excellence.

Placing focus on providers' quality and long-term outcomes would also require that the Victorian VET funding model actively encourage providers to develop and refine their capacity for monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities in a coordinated manner. Although the sector benefits from stakeholders that currently produce highly useful data products, e.g. NCVER, providers would benefit significantly from having the in-house capacity to supplement and expand on these data with qualitative research to tailor their services to their client cohorts and institutional needs. In short, incentivising strong evaluation capacity within providers could make the sector more able to identify and seek excellence. A practical way to incentivise monitoring, evaluation, and learning would be to directly fund such activities in contracts, by possibly decoupling funding for monitoring and evaluation from contact hour rates. This way, a sufficient allocation of resources to support quality maintenance and improvement will be present, above and beyond the contact hour provision. Tasking providers with focusing on continuous improvement and enabling them to undertake it in an evidence-based manner would, over time, provide additional data for decision-making and a more evidence-responsive group of providers to support Victoria in building a future-ready economy. This approach, though more costly in the short term, could yield long-term value and confidence in the VET system.

How could governance arrangements for public education and training providers change, to reduce waste and foster greater collaboration?

AMES find that it is critical to structural reforms in the VET system to increase collaboration. The current level of competition amongst TAFEs for students and hours directly undermines the possibility for collaboration, and so future policy directions should address this.

Another way to foster greater collaboration in the sector is to ensure focus on the needs of learners, as well as recognising and celebrating the place smaller providers such as Learn Locals play in the sector. AMES Australia has had success in developing learning pathways for students to commence their educational journey, in particular language, literacy and numeracy development, start in Learn Locals and move to TAFE. By delivering pre-accredited education and training in a variety of community settings, AMES programs reach a broad range of Victorians including disadvantaged learners from migrant and refugee backgrounds. Through a learner-centric approach that identifies an individual learner's unique challenges and aspirations, AMES has built the confidence and capacity of learners to successfully transition between pre-accredited programs and TAFE. Building

linkages between different parts of the post-secondary sector can ensure that learning pathways are best suited to individual learners' needs.

Issues for Students

Literacy and numeracy: What support do you offer students struggling with literacy and numeracy? Are pre-enrolment assessments effective?

AMES Australia's core delivery is language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills with pathway courses in qualifications with strong employment outcomes clients benefit from a contextualised approach to literacy and numeracy in vocational program delivery. By embedding this learning in workplace contexts, AMES learners are able to connect to a more holistic view of how learning can connect to a particular type of job or occupation, teach the norms and values expected in the Australian workplace, and support other holistic settlement – as well as learning – outcomes. Additionally, AMES Australia clients benefit from the delivery of content in multiple modalities. For instance, we have designed and implemented literacy and numeracy skills development via online learning modules on behalf of the Victorian government in response to COVID-19. This was able to be offered effectively and efficiently due to AMES established approach to blended learning including web-based training in its language and literacy programs.

Developing Literacy and Numeracy online modules in response to COVID-19

To support the Victorian Government's '*Working for Victoria*' online platform that aims to help job seekers find work and employers find workers, including those who have lost their jobs, or businesses who need more workers due to the impact of COVID-19, AMES Australia was asked to develop a suite of online learning modules. The Department of Education had assessed that these modules needed to be sector-specific, based on the jobs that were in demand during the COVID-19 and would continue to be important after the pandemic, such as customer service, hospitality, health care, and retail. Some of these sectors had fundamentally changed due to COVID-19, and therefore workers may need to gain different, or additional, literacy and numeracy skills to do these jobs.

Based on a survey of over 800 AMES students from courses in English as an Additional Language (EAL) 1, 2, and 3, over 90% of students had access to a mobile phone, however, had limited data capacity. AMES advised Department that content on the '*Working for Victoria*' platform needed to be optimised for mobile.

AMES was tasked with developing 18 literacy and numeracy modules to meet this demand; 1 that was a generic literacy and numeracy module, with the rest focused on specific industries. AMES teachers, curriculum, and digital engagement teams collaboratively developed the digital content based on AMES extensive experience and teaching resources. At the time of writing 6 modules have been delivered to the Department.

Lastly, AMES Australia believes that the current pre-enrolment assessments that we apply are effective. These include an initial English reading and writing assessment enabling teachers to determine learners' ability level. Moreover, aspects of our pre-training assessments are valuable in further tailoring learning to clients' aspirations and the suitability of the course to their skill levels and intended career paths. In general, the compliance-oriented assessments in SEE and AMEP and

SkillsFirst are effective. These things being said, there is an increasing need to assess Digital Literacy because, especially since the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic, learning of is conducted online. Without assessing Digital Literacy prior to enrolment might precluding participation for those without basic skills or increase the likelihood of drop out.

Apprenticeships/traineeships: How do you support apprentices and trainees complete their course? What other support could be offered?

AMES Australia finds that Bridging programs are of key importance, whether full or part qualifications. Ensuring sufficient funding and incentives for such programs from both the government, as well as Corporate Social Responsibility programs, could allow for skilled new or recently arrived migrants and refugees to be linked more effectively to professional opportunities.

Engineering Pathways Industry Cadetship (EPIC) for refugee and asylum seeker professionals

The Victorian Government's Engineering Pathways Industry Cadetship (EPIC) scheme which commenced in October 2019 is aimed at helping people from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds to overcome barriers to workforce participation by providing opportunities to work on Victoria's major infrastructure projects while training towards a Graduate Certificate in Infrastructure and Engineering. In partnership with the Level Crossing Removal Project, 23 refugee professionals and clients of AMES were invited to interview with employers including Australian Rail Track Corporation, V/Line, and Metro Trains Melbourne as part of the EPIC scheme. Ultimately nine of the 23 applicants gained cadetships, with some of the other unsuccessful applicants being offered other opportunities as a direct result of their application.

Cadets are undertaking full-time paid employment and training cadetship over 18 months and the accredited qualification is customised to the requirements of transport infrastructure which will see \$60 billion spent on it over the next decade providing employment and career opportunities. AMES also delivered a Cultural Competency workshop for the cadets and their Managers immediately prior to the launch of the program to increase understanding, communication and effective interaction between the cadets and longer-term staff. It also helped Managers to better address the needs of their new workers.

Regarding incentives, building in specific considerations for hiring CALD clients into government contracts and KPIs could support individuals with social disadvantages similar to some of AMES Australia's clients. An exemplar for good policy is the Victorian Social Procurement Framework which has been very effective in creating incentives for businesses involved in major government projects and supply contracts to create training programs/practical experience programs for a range of potential employees with multiple barriers. There is however still a significant barrier in getting a wider range of businesses to provide practical placement opportunities for developing practical experience. Lastly, we note that Jobbank understands well that CALD communities can require special support – CALD individuals are in the middle of their list of social disadvantages. Because our CALD clients compete with local new graduates, employers should be sufficiently encouraged to consider CALD applicants.

Cost: How do you set course fees and communicate them to students? How are course fees affected by changing government subsidy levels?

AMES Australia considers three primary areas in setting fees: market research, other providers' fees, and our learners' ability to pay. Broadly speaking, AMES Australia seeks to set course fees as low as possible to provide as much access to post-secondary education as possible to learners who may not

be able to afford it elsewhere. This is, in part, driven by the fact that our role in the community is to help new and recently arrived refugees and migrants settle faster, and VET is only one important component of that process. Due to AMES Australia's commitment to CALD communities, we provide high-quality education and training hours at a low cost, but this approach is likely not a sustainable approach long term.

AMES course fees are communicated to prospective students via AMES website via a simplified cost display. We find that presenting the simplified version helps students make informed decisions. Moreover, we provide a full list of course fees in accordance with our compliance requirements, but anecdotally find that this list is less user-friendly than the simplified display. Lastly, we have a client acquisition team who discuss the course cost when communicating with students about a course.

Government subsidies can significantly affect a student's ability to study or continue to study in terms of having the capacity to pay. As an example, with Skills First funded courses, where a student is eligible for government subsidy there is a fee of \$0.65 p/h for tuition; and for concession card holders this drops down to \$0.13 p/h tuition, which is in addition to \$43.00 materials fee. AMES also offers payment by units delivered, meaning that if a student enrolls in two units for term 1, then the student only needs to pay for those hours of tuition.

Learning: What could be done to improve curriculum and assessment?

Curriculum and assessment could be improved by developing and refining approaches to compliance that trust low risk, experienced providers to adapt to meet the needs of learners and cohorts; and support the development of curriculum and resources that allow learners to achieve workplace-defined competency standards. The VET system is underpinned by Training Packages and accredited courses and compliance-driven assessment tools. While there is latitude to adapt to specific learner cohorts, this is bounded by course packaging rules. Though delivering micro - or part-qualifications may be merited to meet learner goals in some cases, there may be organisational limitations or funding implications that reduce the providers' desire for this to occur. Secondly, the compliance requirements, including assessment tools and all resources being available before marketing a new course or unit set, often provide an impediment to being flexible in meeting the needs of individual learners or cohorts. A one size fits all approach to compliance in the system seems to have been implemented in reaction to the open market growth of RTOs over the past 15 plus years. The system would likely benefit from additional flexibility for trusted providers.

AMES Australia finds that an alternative to the current approach may be a VET system accredited context where competency standards are recognised as workplace standards. Moreover, in which the framework from which courses and/or curricula and assessments were developed to scaffold learning to achieve a competency outcome as a result of the training experience. The training system could support and fund curriculum development and resources to strengthen consistency in how courses were delivered, and learners were supported. Teachers and trainers in this system would likely be better connected to their industry, blending their training role with work. This may be especially advantageous for trades.

AMES would also like to highlight the findings from the *'Good Practice in VET Teaching and Learning – a guide to practitioner perspectives'* commissioned by the Victorian Department of Education and Training provides practice-informed information about, and examples of, good practice in teaching

and learning for VET providers.⁴ The guide emphasises that assessing learner needs within the program development stage is a key indicator of quality practice. A good program takes account of what each learner brings with them and builds on this to achieve the course's planned educational and employment outcomes. This process should ensure that learners are placed in the course that best matches their aspirations and entry abilities, including their background knowledge and skills. In developing this guide, consultation with the sector, including AMES, indicated that needs assessment should be routinely reviewed to address concerns for the individual learner and ensure the required support services are readily available. The needs assessment process also provides a mechanism for linking individual and collective needs. Assessment should be designed with attention to the learner profile, competency requirements and delivery plan. During program delivery, assessment is the process of collecting evidence from multiple sources and making professional judgements as to whether competency has been achieved by the learner. For assessment to be effective, assessors need to understand the principles of competency-based assessment, and Recognition of Prior Learning. Assessment is not an isolated process, it is a collaborative approach that includes the learner, the educator/s, and industry input and feedback. A critical aspect of improving curriculum and assessment along with their relevance to practical industry, workplace or general social needs is about how you a provider uses them, applies them and relates them to the individual learner.

Getting a good job: How do you monitor and support your students' transition to relevant employment? What works, and what is needed?

At AMES Australia, post-employment support is provided primarily by our Employment arm as part of its jobactive contract. This said, AMES Australia offers sessions themed around transitioning into the workforce as students move toward this milestone. These sessions are provided in a generic, applicable-to-all format, as well as through pathway planning with individuals. When we have information about a specific employment opportunity, we often target these sessions/planning to directly assist a client or group of clients. AMES Australia gains useful information by directly working with employers through our Employment team. For instance, we often learn about worker skills and characteristics required by the employer for a particular job vacancy. AMES experience indicates that tailored linkages such as this often brings best results.

Additionally, AMES Australia has a **Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP)**. This is a three-week intensive pre-employment course targeting skilled migrants which includes vocational counselling and guest speakers from the corporate sector. SPMP students learn about the Australian job market and workplace culture, writing Australian style resumes, cover letters and key selection criteria, networking and other skills to better position themselves to resume their professional careers in Australia. The SPMP is offered in a mixed-mode, blended delivery, including classroom-based learning and online remote learning. Permanent residents may be eligible for a Government-subsidised place, otherwise, the course is accessible at a fee regardless of visa status. SPMP students are assigned a mentor after the program who offer one-on-one support with job applications and assist their mentees to identify their strengths, skill gaps and professional development areas. Mentors are matched as closely as possible to mentees professional backgrounds so that they can provide industry-specific guidance and networking support. Mentees also practice Australian style interviews and receive individual feedback from their mentors. An additional strength of the program is that it provides professional migrants with the opportunity to meet like-minded professionals and be part of a large alumni group of SPMP graduates who continue to support one

⁴ Stevens, D. Deschepper, A. (2018) Good Practice in Teaching and Learning – a guide to practitioner perspectives.

another long after the course has ended. AMES SPMP Alumni group on LinkedIn keeps over 800 SPMP Alumni in contact and is one such forum where Alumni share job opportunities, industry insights and organise networking events.

Mentoring program helping skilled migrants into work

Approximately 80% of students in AMES SPMP secure work after completing the program; 61% in professional jobs. Before enrolling in the SPMP program, data indicates that 35% of participants had worked in Australia. Those who had worked were mostly in low skilled or non-professional roles.⁵

Construction engineer Anthony from China migrated to Australia in 2018. After an initial struggle to find work in his field, he joined the SPMP to learn more about the local job market and application process. Two months after completing the program, he secured a job as a project coordinator working for a small building company. Anthony said being matched with a mentor who had over 25 years of experience in his industry was very helpful. "My mentor helped me to understand the recruitment process and the purpose of the process," Anthony said, "I was able to attend interviews with a clear idea of what message to get across to the recruiter," he said.

Completing: Why do students leave courses before completing? How do you support students to maximise their chances of completing?

AMES observes a highly diverse and variable group of reasons why students leave before completing. These include:

- challenges from their personal lives/family commitments (especially women)
- settlement issues like health, housing, etc
- employment to meet the immediate need to secure an income
- pregnancy, birth of a baby, child-rearing responsibilities
- mental health issues related to trauma/shock
- dissatisfaction with the program/teaching approach.

Courses need to be meaningful for clients' needs, accessible and acknowledge what is already known by the learner so that they can progress quickly to achieve the competencies that they require. Learners are more likely to leave if they are repeating studies and feel as though they are wasting time and energy on a topic that they already know. Based on this, using an approach in which students are treated as individuals to support their learning is promoted. One way to achieve this in practice is to provide alternatives for learning beyond the stock standard traditional times, locations, modes and methods. AMES advise that the review is a significant opportunity to result in support for more flexible delivery of post-secondary education. The response to COVID-19 provides the impetus and examples to learn from and further develop in the VET sector.

Issues for Providers

What are the strengths and development priorities of your teaching workforce? What could be done to support their development?

AMES Australia has identified the following strengths of its teaching workforce, our teachers:

- understand different cultures and newly arrived cohorts well and are able to cater for learners individually as well as draw different groups together in the learning process,

⁵ AMES Australia (2018) *A report on professional mentoring in AMES Australia's Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP)* https://www.ames.net.au/-/media/files/research/spmp-mentoring-report_feb2018_final.pdf

- have solid language learning approaches linked to respected, accredited curricula,
- have passion for their work in supporting their learners.

AMES Australia has identified several development priorities for its teaching workforce. The key objective in identifying Teaching and Learning (T&L) Priorities is to address the current, ongoing and emerging skills and knowledge needs of Education staff supporting the management, delivery and administration of the range of Education programs and services offered within AMES Australia. T&L Priorities are determined through a process of review and consideration of needs identified through, for example, teaching and learning initiatives and focus, audit outcomes and where operational practice identifies gaps in knowledge and skills. T&L Priorities inform professional development activity and create a structure for reporting activity.

For 2020 three T&L Priorities have been identified and endorsed by AMES Board of Studies (Blended learning; VET professional practice; and Industry currency). Moving beyond textbook language learning to more language in a context related to settlement, employment, and pathways to further study provides language learning with a purpose. Also, online teaching methodologies and materials are increasingly important, resulting in more flexible approaches to learning beyond the traditional classroom. Lastly, it is critical to adapt new curricula to contexts and simplify delivery and assessment. This should involve becoming less assessment-focused and more outcomes-driven, which likely requires continuing to improve our understandings of the employment market, work opportunities, desired skills and attributes of an employee, and pathway options and opportunities. Greater industry engagement by teachers through industry release and volunteering in the workplace is supported by AMES for its VET teaching workforce.

What does excellence look like for you, in post-secondary education and training? What examples of excellence exist in Victoria?

Excellence in post-secondary education is characterised by making the most of individual learners' potential in a manner that allows that potential to be best used in the economy. The ideal scenario is when post-secondary education both meets a labour market need and adds demonstrable value to the learner's life. Achieving this requires flexibility to understand an individual's potential and the labour market needs on the ground. The learners entering the Victorian post-secondary system are diverse, and this is particularly marked in the AMES cohort. Thus, flexibility is key. One practical way to achieve flexibility not already mentioned in this submission is through curriculum design that includes transferrable 'soft' skills – intermittently identified as employability or core skills for work. Working towards these can make learners more ready for a career pathway rather than industry-specific skills only.

Moreover, excellence is achieved when a provider is aware of a learner's expectations and exceeds them. Providers being driven by learners needs and feedback is critical.

Additionally, good practices towards excellence identified include:

- focus on student learning for application as life skills, work skills and independent learning
- committed and engaged professional teaching staff who are lifelong learners themselves providing relevant and engaging content
- demonstrated relationships with industry and employers that endorse and support the training program, assessment approaches and standards and employ graduates of programs
- connecting students to the workplace through industry visits, industry guests, and alumni visits

- explicit focus on how workplaces operate in terms of systems, processes, language, and culture
- the hallmark of the system is recognised locally, nationally and internationally as 'fit for purpose' and capable of delivering outcomes that are valued.

Sources to identify good practice could be provided through the Victorian Government's education and training awards for RTOs, TAFEs, LLOs and individuals within these organisations and their students are recognised and acknowledged against a set of criteria. These award-winning individuals and organisations could become the source of mentoring, coaching and buddying for organisations seeking enhanced teaching and learning practices.

Excellence could also mean a post-secondary system that involves closer linkages between government and providers that understand the unique needs of various key groups of learners, for instance, AMES Australia regarding the needs of CALD clients.

Issues for Industry and Unions

What does 'work-readiness' mean to you? How do you support work-readiness for your students, and what extra support would help?

In addition to the skills identified in earlier responses, work readiness involves non-vocational skills for the workplace. The Victorian Department of Education Employability Skills Framework (2006) which identifies personal attributes and defines workplace skills seen by employers as most important, could benefit from a review in the current context.

AMES Australia's Employment team often finds that learners who are keen to work, committed to working hard, and are punctual and reliable often have the best outcomes. To achieve optimal labour market outcomes, vocational skills needs to be complemented by strong support of these non-vocational skills. One approach for undertaking this work more effectively and collaboratively going forward could be to establish a "round table" that supports TAFEs and other providers in engaging with industry practitioners rather than one-to-one.

How is industry involved in the delivery of education and training in your institution?
What is working and what is not?

Developing the means to get learners interested in careers in growth industries, such as aged care, is a critical question to answer for this review. AMES Employment team reflect that one of the key challenges in making the linkage between key growth industries and our clients are driving client demand for jobs in these industries. It is sometimes more difficult for job brokers to "sell" careers in growing sectors that are not particularly "glamorous" and have average rates of pay. AMES Australia finds that our clients who move successfully into these fields are often those who we have connected successfully to their aspirations about having both a job and a way to contribute to their communities.

Teaching the 'Language of Aged Care'

AMES delivers Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing, Home and Community) incorporating specialist English language support for migrants and refugees to support the development of both

English language competency and vocational skills. This helps to ensure that CALD women can successfully complete the course (approximately 90% of enrolments are women) and are well-equipped for a career in Individual Support. The programs are delivered by dual-qualified teachers with both TESOL and relevant vocational qualifications; or by teaching pair with the combined qualifications.

This course, as well as other AMES vocational courses, are closely aligned with the needs of industry. Communication skills are taught so that students can effectively communicate with patients, often through contextualised learning or 'learning by doing'. Contextualised language support is often in the form of workplace simulated activities and role-play. For example, one student will practice being the 'carer' and the other will be the 'patient', and they will role-play moving the patient from their chair to their bed, navigating the relevant equipment and ensuring that the patient is always comfortable. The students are taught how to treat the patients with respect, how to be patient with them, and how to put themselves in the shoes of the patients. Individual Support employers also attend classes to share information on how to apply to their various institutions, and how students can be successful in a career in Individual Support. Students learn and write down key industry words and their meaning in their own language as well as the English meaning, repeat these words every day, and practice using them before an interview.

The skills that Individual Support students learn not only support them to gain employment but give them a range of social skills for beyond the workplace, supporting their overall settlement journey in Australia.

AMES experience is that many new arrivals are highly motivated to start work as soon as possible after they arrive in Australia. Without supported access to VET, that is customised to their needs, these new arrivals are at risk of not becoming work-ready and reaching their employment goals, and employers will miss out on the potential contribution of this cohort to the Australian workforce.

Ensuring that AMES clients are work-ready often means helping them find the appropriate training trajectory. Previous education background and very minimal English skills are the major barriers to refugees and migrants undertaking any vocational study using existing models in TAFE Institutes. The time it will take people to develop confident foundation skills and a sufficient level of competence in industry-level technical skills (i.e. achieve a VET qualification outcome) from this starting point should not be underestimated. AMES vocational courses are delivered by dual-qualified teachers (that is with both the vocational qualification and a TESOL qualification) or by a teaching pair with the combined qualifications. This approach of contextualised English language learning has been shown to support the development of both English language competency and vocational skills to ensure that CALD students can successfully complete the course. In 2018-19, 83.7% of learners completed Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, 27% higher than the Victorian state average. 84.1% of learners completed Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing, Home and Community), 22% higher than the Victorian state average.⁶ Importantly graduates of these programs are offered work in the sector – often in workplaces where they have undertaken practical placement.

Additional Note: Skills/qualification recognition for AMES cohort

AMES Australia's experience providing services to a number of skilled migrants and refugees with overseas skills and qualifications indicates that first, providing more information and guidance to these cohorts would support skills/qualification recognition. Newly arrived migrants and refugees

⁶ State average completion data is derived from AMES education system. This is integrated with national VET reporting systems 1. (AVETMISS).

often do not understand the difference between qualification/skills assessment for migration purposes and the Australian qualifications recognition process. Providing information resources in languages other than English would likely support AMES Australia's client base. Beyond this, newly arrived migrants and refugees could increasingly be referred into VET and pre-accredited courses that are structured to assist skilled migrants to build their local networks, understand the Australian workplace, and give pre-employment support. A lack of Australian workplace experience can often compound the barriers posed by the lack of recognised qualifications/skills. Such interventions can help newly arrived skilled migrants and refugees avoid un- or under-employment in roles not commensurate with their skills. Work experience, cadetships and/or mentoring opportunities facilitated by employers can further assist new migrants on their skill recognition journey. Cultural awareness training and promoting the recruitment of migrants and refugees can strengthen employers' capacity to test these interventions and support a diverse workforce. AMES is currently analysing data on recently arrived Syrian and Iraqi refugees to identify the relationship between an individual's educational and employment histories, their current occupations, and their plans and aspirations for their future employment. Research such as this will strengthen the understanding of better practice initiatives for local service providers.

These dynamics are particularly marked for overseas qualified professionals, especially those who have come to Australia as humanitarian migrants. **The Career Pathways Pilot (CPP)** for Humanitarian Entrants was a federally funded initiative that focused on supporting skilled refugees gain formal recognition of their overseas skills or qualifications. It also supported refugees to follow a career pathway that recognised the value of the skills and experience they bring to Australia. AMES delivered the CPP in Victoria between July 2017 – June 2019, supporting 361 refugee professionals on their pathway to gain formal recognition of their skills. Upon conclusion of the program, 102 had secured employment, with the majority securing work in their previous profession or a related role. A further 170 were engaged in further study. In total, 75% of CPP clients were progressing in their career pathway. Since the pilot ended there has been no announcement from the Federal Government if funding will be reinstated for CPP-type program, despite skilled refugees being a proportion of recent arrivals in Australia⁷. The Victorian government could potentially fill the void left by this valuable program. An exemplar of supporting humanitarian migrants thought re-qualification is:

Refugee physician supported to re-qualify through the Career Pathway Pilot (CPP)

Asseel worked as a surgeon in Iraq during the conflict there saving hundreds of lives. On arrival in Australia in 2017, he initially struggled to find his way into practising medicine again in Australia due to the cost and the complex and arduous process of requalification. Determined to re-establish his medical career in Australia, he achieved the English test score required by APHRA to requalify at the first attempt. Rather than pursue requalification under the Australian Medical Council standard pathway for overseas medical practitioners, he chose to requalify under the specialist pathway. In October 2018, he successfully interviewed with the Australian Royal College of Physicians which assessed his skills and suitability to work as a medical practitioner under supervision within the Australian hospital system. The CPP invested \$14,000 to assist him in his pathway including the provision of a skilled migrant's course to prepare him for interviews, understand the cultural differences in work environments and to provide him with a mentor. It is through the mentor program at AMES that he was able to successfully apply for the position as Senior Health Registrar at a Victorian Hospital. He commenced work in January 2019 while he continues to train in his field under the guidelines of the Royal College of Physicians.

⁷ Note: arrivals are currently paused due to the COVID crisis.