‘More of the same’ won’t do the trick:

Increasing the reach of the

Adult Migrant English Program

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Executive summary

This study drew on data from a wide range of sources:

- reach data
- a review of relevant literature
- consultations with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) staff and a cross-section of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) providers nationally
- interviews with focus groups of current and potential AMEP clients from under-represented groups
- consultations with community organisations.

The project did not attempt to survey a statistically valid sample of immigrants and refugees who had not registered for the AMEP, and there are inevitable limitations on the validity of extrapolations made as a result of different inputs from providers, community and client groups. Clients who do not register appear to experience much greater difficulty overcoming settlement problems than those who register.

As regards information about the AMEP, there is still a community perception that the advice on entitlements made available to immigrants at overseas posts is inconsistent. Following restrictions on entitlements to AMEP tuition, community groups and welfare agency staff are hesitant about providing advice to clients on what entitlement they have.

The vast majority of immigrants and refugees are keen to learn English. Humanitarian entrants, who may benefit from up to an additional 100 hours of Special Preparatory classes, generally have high AMEP registration rates. The principal reasons potential AMEP clients do not register arise from their giving priority to meeting other needs, or inability to reconcile competing priorities. In particular, it appears that most new arrivals who are not reached by the AMEP:

- rely on word of mouth for their assessment of the value of the AMEP;
- misunderstand the rules for registration, enrolment and completion of 510 hours and find them too inflexible to meet their needs;
- give priority to finding, and subsequently not jeopardising, employment;
- do not perceive that AMEP tuition will significantly improve their English or do not perceive that AMEP tuition will enable them to gain employment or a better job;
- are saving all they can to bring other family members to Australia;
- cannot afford any additional costs associated with attendance at AMEP classes, such as travel or child care;
- do not have ready access to culturally appropriate childcare and family daycare;
- demonstrate a great lack of confidence in their capacity to cope with intensive, formal learning, particularly in the case of students who are illiterate, elderly or have low levels of formal education;
require a less intensive introduction to formal language learning, perhaps as little as 2 hours a week;

- can be responsive to special purpose classes (eg ‘English for childbirth’);
- would welcome, in some instances, access to bilingual or gender segregated classes;
- do not receive the extra help they are likely to need (eg with pronunciation in the case of students from a language background which is distant from English) because of the AMEP structure and other students’ need to progress unhindered.

The report makes a number of recommendations to DIMA and providers proposing ways of addressing these and some lesser issues. These include:

- reconsideration of time limits associated with registration and AMEP completion;
- more translation of material on entitlements;
- a trial of promotional ‘vouchers for 510 hours tuition’ for everyone with an AMEP entitlement;
- appropriate publicity, pre- and post-arrival, about AMEP students’ success, as a result of improved English, in finding employment suited to their aspirations;
- more emphasis on a truly consultative relationship with key communities;
- improved links between providers, community and employment agencies;
- improved childcare and opportunity for parents to become familiar with it;
- greater flexibility in course offerings and approaches to improving accessibility;
- greater use of bilingual teachers, or teacher aides, and distance learning;
- reimbursement of Home Tutors’ travel costs up to an agreed limit;
- the development of resources nationally catering to the interests of special groups;
- a greater focus on spoken English for some categories of students and reconsideration of English literacy for all as an essential outcome of the AMEP; professional development addressing the needs of torture and trauma victims and cross-cultural sensitivity, including culture-specific modules where appropriate.
Definitions

The key terms and acronyms used in this study, or terms used with a restricted meaning, are:

ACL  Australian Centre for Languages (a provider in NSW)
AMEP  Adult Migrant English Program
ARMS  AMEP Reporting and Management System
ASLPR  Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating

Childcare  Mention of childcare and any other government services refers only to these services in so far as they are advertised as being available to and/or are taken up by AMEP clients.

Clients  This term is used generically, and partly interchangeably with ‘students’, to embrace all those visa categories of new arrivals in Australia, whether refugees or immigrants, who by virtue of their visa category and need for improved English are entitled to up to 510 hours of English language teaching under the AMEP (however, some categories, such as refugees, may be entitled to an additional, preparatory 100 hours). Where the distinction between refugees and migrants is pertinent to the study’s focus on AMEP’s reach, these specific terms will be used. While all students in this context are clients, the need for this study reflects the fact that not all eligible AMEP clients in fact become AMEP students.

DETYA  Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DEWRSB  Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
DIMA  Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
ENS  Employer Nomination Scheme
ESL  English as a Second Language
European  For ease of reference, the term ‘European language speakers’ is used in discussing the relative difficulty speakers of some other languages, notably Arabic, the Chinese languages and Vietnamese, may experience in learning English, it does not mean that all the languages spoken in Europe are equally closely related to English or that any one language is predominantly spoken in Europe.
FECCA  Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia
IELTS  International English Language Testing System
Immigrant(s) For the purposes of this study, where the term *immigrant(s)* is used to distinguish between immigrants and refugees, it refers only to those categories of immigrants who hold visas which entitle them to register under the AMEP.

LSIA Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (DIMA 2000)

MRC The abbreviations (MRC) for Multicultural Resource Centre, as well as (WCA) for welfare and community groups and (P) for providers, are used to identify the source of these key perspectives when quoting otherwise anonymous respondents.

NCELTR National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (Macquarie University)

NMIU DIMA's National Management Information Unit

P The abbreviations (P) for providers, (WCA) for welfare and community groups as well as (MRCs) are used to identify the source of these key perspectives when quoting otherwise anonymous respondents.

Providers AMEP tuition is provided across Australia at centres managed by more than 30 individual organisations which successfully tendered, in several instances as members of consortia, to deliver the program. Depending on the context, the term ‘provider(s)’—generally used in the plural—refers not only to the individual organisation(s) which may hold a principal contract with DIMA in a given State/Territory or city, but to its partner organisations, as well as centres at which teaching is delivered to clients.

Reach Since 1992, reach has been defined as the proportion of those newly arrived immigrants with poor or no English who have registered for the AMEP.

Respondents The terms, ‘informants’, ‘interlocutors’ and ‘respondents’, are used interchangeably to refer to those individuals who were nominated by their respective organisations to respond to the researchers’ questions in the course of this study.

Torture and trauma victims

Refers to potential or current clients of the AMEP who are suffering the effects of torture and trauma experienced before arriving in Australia; most torture and trauma victims arrive as refugees, although some may be admitted under family reunion visas. They have an entitlement to up to 100 hours of Special Preparatory classes before accessing the AMEP. This approach is intended to equip them emotionally and psychologically and with the social skills necessary to participate in mainstream AMEP classes, or other tuition. The learning difficulties of torture and trauma victims may be compounded by illiteracy in their own languages.

WCA The abbreviations (WCA) for welfare and community groups as well as (MRCs) and (P) for providers, are used to identify the source of these key perspectives when quoting otherwise anonymous respondents.

4 Increasing the reach of the Adult Migrant English Program
Chapter 1

Introduction

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) plays a major role in enabling immigrants to successfully settle in Australia by helping them to develop their English language skills, and providing essential information about community services and access to job and training pathways. In 1998–99, funding of $A94.9 million was allocated to the AMEP.

Eligible clients have an entitlement of up to 510 hours as long as they register within three months of their arrival and take up their entitlement within their first year (with some exceptions). As well as fulfilling a key settlement function, the AMEP also plays a critical role in gaining community support for the nation’s immigration program. It is vitally important, therefore, that newly arrived immigrants with poor English have ready access to ESL services and use their tuition entitlement.

Reach is one of the key performance indicators of the AMEP as it measures the extent to which newly arrived immigrants with a ‘need’ for English proficiency access the AMEP in their initial settlement period. It is therefore also a measure of the success or otherwise of the strategies put in place by both DIMA and AMEP service providers to promote the AMEP and to inform prospective eligible clients of their entitlement.

Rationale and focus of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate ways of maintaining a high level of registration in the AMEP consistent with the aim of Government policy as stated in ‘English language tuition for adult migrants’ (DIMA, 1998):

As part of a range of settlement services for newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants, the Australian Government provides basic English language tuition for adult migrants.

The tuition is available to adult migrants for whom English is not the first language, and who have been assessed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) as not having functional English language skills.

The tuition is administered by DIMA through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).

DIMA funds organisations in each State and Territory to provide AMEP courses. [...]
Several learning arrangements operate under the AMEP, including formal courses through teaching centres in metropolitan and major regional centres, and distance learning arrangements throughout Australia.

Informal tuition is also available through the Home Tutor Scheme, which uses trained volunteers in major cities and non-metropolitan areas, and through self-paced learning in Individual Learning Centres.

**Eligibility**

The tuition is open to newly-arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants from overseas, and to people already in Australia who are changing from temporary to permanent resident status.

If they are assessed as not having functional English, they are entitled to 510 hours of tuition, or the number of hours it takes to reach functional English—whichever comes first. In some circumstances, additional tuition may be provided.

They need to register for their entitlement within three months of arrival or grant of permanent residence, start tuition within one year, and complete tuition within three years.

Deferrals may be authorised in some circumstances.

People who arrived in Australia as permanent residents before 1 July 1991 are not eligible for the AMEP.

Specifically, this study is concerned with investigating reach patterns to identify factors which account for lower participation by particular groups of immigrants. It also seeks to document current successful strategies and recommend possible action by DIMA or providers to improve the level of participation by under-represented groups and by AMEP clients generally. The concern with reach is of paramount importance, not only in ensuring successful settlement outcomes for all newly arrived immigrants with less than functional English, but also in setting targets and judging the effectiveness of the AMEP. One of the aims of tendering out AMEP services in 1997–8 was to offer a greater degree of choice to AMEP clients as to where and how they took up their tuition entitlement, and in this way to increase the number of eligible immigrants accessing AMEP services. If tuition entitlements are not fully utilised, there are few formal opportunities for immigrants to acquire English proficiency after the initial settlement period. Furthermore, low reach rates reduce efficiency of delivery, particularly in relation to under-utilised teaching, accommodation and the achievement of target class sizes.

While this study focuses on negative influences on AMEP's reach and means of improving reach, it is important to point out at the outset, especially given the vagaries of human circumstances in which the many
thousands of eligible immigrants and refugees find themselves, that the vast majority of eligible immigrants and refugees do in fact take up their entitlement to AMEP tuition.

The focus on registration under the AMEP also needs to be clearly distinguished from enrolment in a specific course and subsequent retention of students until course outcomes have been achieved and entitlements used. Negative influences on retention and how these can best be addressed are the subject of the second study in this volume.

**Methodology**

The study drew on data from a wide range of sources. These included:

- an analysis of reach data based on information collected by the National Management Information Unit and identification of under-represented groups of AMEP clients in different States;
- a review of relevant literature relating to reach policies, patterns and trends within the AMEP;
- consultations with DIMA staff responsible for providing information about AMEP entitlements to immigrants and refugees overseas, and on arrival in Australia;
- consultations with a cross-section of AMEP providers nationally;
- focus-group discussions with current and potential AMEP clients from the under-represented groups identified in the statistical data analysis;
- consultations with community organisations dealing with under-represented groups in specific localities, such as Migrant Resource Centres, interagencies and specific ethnic community organisations.

Based on an analysis of reach data, the groups potentially most likely to experience difficulty in registration were tentatively identified as including specific ethnic groups, older people, young mothers, working-age males/females, and family reunion groups. The communities identified as under-represented were primarily from Vietnam, China, the Lebanon, Somalia, Ethiopia, Iraq and Russia, as well as Indonesia, the former USSR, Japan, the Philippines, Sudan and East Timor.

Face-to-face interviews were held in Melbourne, Sydney and the Australian Capital Territory, and views from other States and the Northern Territory were sought by questionnaire and follow-up telephone interviews. The specific areas of interest identified for discussion were:

- the proportions of different immigrant and refugee groups from non-English speaking backgrounds who are eligible for English language tuition but in fact fail to register for tuition under the AMEP;
- the reasons why some categories of eligible immigrants and refugees are significantly under-represented in AMEP registrations;
• improvements to information provided to eligible immigrants and refugees both overseas and within Australia;

• worthwhile initiatives identified by AMEP providers that could contribute to increasing reach, particularly among groups that are most under-represented.

Details of individuals and organisations consulted, and a copy of the questionnaire on approaches to publicity used by providers are provided in Appendixes 1 and 2. For reasons of confidentiality, views of individuals or organisations are not directly attributed in the report.

**Literature search**

Departmental estimates of reach have remained relatively constant in recent years, despite a range of strategies used by DIMA’s overseas posts to inform successful visa applicants of their entitlement, and considerable efforts by AMEP providers to inform potential clients through advertising and networking with ethnic community organisations.

There has been little published research on AMEP reach, and the reasons for such a significant percentage of potential clients forgoing their entitlements to English tuition. Part of the reason may lie in the difficulties in accessing such a diffuse target group with, presumably, limited proficiency in English. In this section, we briefly review published research relating to these issues.

An early study undertaken by Kessler (1984) interviewed a group of 101 non-AMEP clients with a similar demographic profile to those then attending AMEP courses. In contrast to the present cohort of AMEP clients, the sample comprised over 50% long-term residents (6 years or more) who at that time still qualified for AMEP services. Yet, the majority of the group (70-80%) self assessed as having inadequate English for their needs. The major reasons given by this group for not enrolling in courses included: limited time (69%), domestic and family responsibilities (56%) and work hours and responsibilities (55%). For a considerable proportion (57%), assistance from family and friends rendered learning English formally unnecessary.

An AMEP client survey by Tait, Harrison and Thomas (1990) surveyed 1202 AMEP course clients throughout the mainland States of Australia in 1989. While this survey focused on those within the AMEP, a number of its findings are relevant to this study. The research identified the AMEP as a gateway and valuable rite of passage to multicultural Australia. It also confirmed that both before and after arrival in Australia, networks of family and friends were the most important source of information about English language classes. Other findings pertinent to this study were:

• 37% did not know that English classes were available prior to arrival;

• 50% of clients with no qualifications and no prior English training had not been aware of the program’s existence;
of those who did know about the existence of English classes, 75% were informed by family or friends;

83% started courses within one year of arrival;

of those who delayed enrolment beyond three months, most did so for course related reasons (eg waiting lists) or personal/family reasons;

the median length of attendance was just under six months;

the main reasons for attending AMEP courses were to improve spoken English (70%), to improve reading and writing (55%) and to get a job or a better job (47%);

only 6% were dissatisfied with classroom activities and 5% with the quality of teaching, resulting in 96% stating that the course had helped them achieve one or more of their objectives.

Since 1990, there has been a progressive refocusing of the AMEP towards newly arrived immigrants starting with an allocation of 90% of all tuition resources to immigrants with less than a three-year period of residence. Policy developments since 1996 have also led to:

• a further tightening of English language proficiency criteria in immigration selection;

• progressive shifts away from concessional family (now called Australia-linked skills) to independent skilled migration, thus reducing demand for the AMEP due to the application of points for English proficiency;

• the introduction, in March 1993, of English Education Charges and associated annual administrative fees (which have been changed or extended a number of times since then). Currently, the charge is designated the second instalment of the visa fee for all migration program applicants (except those in the family and humanitarian stream) whose English proficiency is assessed below functional English. The second instalment is $4555 for business and Employer Nomination Scheme principal applicants and $2275 for all other migration program categories regardless of whether they will be attending English courses. The annual administrative charge for AMEP participants is $280 for classroom and/or distance learning tuition and $60 for informal learning, but most clients are exempt;

• tendering out of the AMEP in all States and Territories, with the emphasis being on partnerships between English language providers (both public and private) and community based non-government organisations offering employment and settlement assistance, and the encouragement of other agencies at Commonwealth and State levels to offer ESL services beyond the first year after arrival.

In 1996, a study undertaken by Plimer and Candlin (1996) analysed the adequacy of language services for women. They noted that although self-assessment data was not available for 40% of new arrivals, reach could be calculated as 66% in 1993 and 1994, with reach being proportionally higher for men than for women, even though women constitute 55% of all AMEP enrolments. Reach was lowest for immigrants from the Philippines, Hong Kong and China and highest for those from Iraq, the former USSR and the former Yugoslavia. Despite their greater absolute numbers, women
from all age categories and almost all birthplace groups accessed the AMEP at a lower rate than their male counterparts.

The study confirmed earlier findings that friends and family are the most common sources of information regarding the AMEP, and noted the need to improve the reach of official sources both before and after arrival in Australia.

Analysing data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) (DIMA 2000), Plimer and Candlin identified the main reasons given for not attending English courses as: immigrants already had adequate English, lack of awareness of courses, family responsibilities, and timetabling and transport difficulties.

McNaught and McGrath (1997) confirmed the 1994 reach statistic and provided more analysis using a range of variables. They found, for example:

- that reach was lowest for preferential family clients (56%) and highest for refugee and humanitarian clients (85%). They suggested that this may be due to the planned on-arrival services for refugees;
- the proportion of females accessing the program was lower (80%) than for males (86%), although the actual proportion of females in the AMEP was greater;
- the lowest rates of registration by country of birth were from Vietnam (68%), and Cambodia (77%) compared to the average of 83%, and the highest was from the former Yugoslavia (90%);
- only 55% of females and 75% of males in the 55–64 year group accessed the program compared to between 86% and 89% of those in the 25–34 year group.

McNaught and McGrath suggested a range of approaches to improve reach, including:

- multiple strategies at different times and locations during the pre- and post-arrival period;
- information in clients’ first languages;
- closer liaison between providers and DIMA to coordinate marketing and intakes of clients;
- greater provision of less formal classes in community settings;
- a review of the three-month registration requirement, at least for the Humanitarian visa category to allow potential clients more time before they commence AMEP courses.

A number of these recommendations have since been adopted, particularly greater community provision, greater discretion in approving deferrals and more information in clients’ first languages.

A more recent study undertaken by Plimer and Jones (1998) also drew on the 7000 unit records of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia (LSIA) (DIMA 2000). Although the LSIA is based on interviews six
months after arrival and a further 12 months after that (thus not strictly comparable), the data suggested a reach rate of 65% with the same gender, age and visa category differentiation as in the previous study. However, it is worth noting that a much higher proportion (80%) of those eligible speakers with poor English who were offered an AMEP entitlement at the time of visa approval, commenced an AMEP course within their first eighteen months, mostly within six months of arrival.

In terms of reach, the study’s key findings were that:

- less than 40% of the immigration intake during this period were speakers with poor English and in need of ESL services;
- almost two-thirds (65%) of this target population have participated in the AMEP with a further 12% participating in other ESL services;
- over 50% of eligible clients claimed that they had not been offered an AMEP entitlement as part of the visa approval process, resulting in most finding out about classes from family and friends;
- only one half of speakers with poor English potentially eligible for the AMEP, had been offered an AMEP entitlement during the visa approval process. Yet, as mentioned above, 80% of those eligible speakers with poor English offered an AMEP entitlement at the time of visa approval, commenced an AMEP course within their first eighteen months, mostly within six months of arrival;
- lowest reach was recorded by those from Greece (37%), China and Hong Kong (49%) and highest reach by those from Iran (87%), Ethiopia (86%) and Taiwan (80%);
- reasons for non-participation by speakers with poor English were primarily employment related followed by family and child care responsibilities;
- structural reasons, such as class location, transport and scheduling, were not cited as significant barriers;
- only 0.5% of the immigration intake stated that they did not want to learn English.

While acknowledging the overwhelmingly positive findings of the study, the report recommended that:

- DIMA review its English language testing procedures overseas and reconsider its decision to abolish the Australian-developed ACCESS test;
- information on AMEP entitlements be made more explicit and accessible in DIMA’s visa approval process;
- specifically targeted strategies be developed for those speakers with poor English, particularly preferential family immigrants, who are not sufficiently accessing English courses.

DIMA has recognised the need for the last two recommendations, and is considering strategies for their adoption, given the practical and logistical challenges surrounding their implementation.
Reach Data

Reach is one of the key performance indicators of the AMEP, with other key performance indicators for the AMEP including:

- retention (the extent to which clients utilise their full entitlement of up to 510 hours of tuition);
- intensity (to ensure that there is a broad mix of course offerings from full-time intensive to part-time community based courses);
- learning outcomes achieved (measured against benchmarks of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English) and relative cost (as measured by the cost per client hour).

Departmental approach to calculating reach

In the AMEP, national reach is defined as the number of new arrivals in any given calendar year who register for the AMEP, expressed as a percentage of the estimated pool of potential clients (those adults who have less than functional English).

In order to estimate the size of the pool of potential AMEP clients, DIMA derives information from the Settlement Data Base (SDB). The SDB collects data provided by migrants on their Settlement Information Form. All successful applicants overseas are asked to complete this form, which includes a self-assessment of their English language ability. Of these applicants, 65% complete and return the form. Of those completing the form, some 10% either indicate 'not stated' for the question on English language ability, or do not complete the question at all. Other possible categories are 'very good', 'good', 'poor' and 'nil'. All persons indicated as 'good', 'poor' and 'nil' are considered potentially in need of AMEP tuition.

In order to ascertain what proportion of the 'not stated' category (which contains those who specified 'not stated' or who skipped the question, and also covers the 35% who did not return the form) would fall into the potential AMEP clients category, the 'not stateds' are apportioned across the other categories in the same proportion as those who did complete the question.

This method calculates annual reach according to an attribution pattern which is unique to that year, being based on such variables as the proportion of potential clients who happened to return the forms and how they self-assessed their English language level. It is considered statistically valid to assume that the 35% who don’t respond would fall in roughly the same proportions into the different categories and that this outcome is robust for calculating reach for any particular year.

However, the methodology is not as robust when it comes to comparing one year’s figures with another’s because the apportioning pattern varies from year to year. Similarly, the methodology does not lend itself to calculating an ‘average reach’ over, say, a three or four year period. Nor does it lend itself to comparison between categories (eg males and females, or Chinese...
and Bosnians), again because the reach of each category is calculated on the basis of the apportionment of ‘not stateds’ according to an apportioning pattern that is unique to that category. This is particularly the case in considering small groups.

Applicants who receive their visas in Australia are also requested to complete the Settlement Information Form, but only about 30% do so. Again, approximately 10% of these put ‘not stated’ for English language ability, or do not complete the question. This small percentage of applicants who respond is not considered statistically representative of the whole. Therefore, rather than try and apportion the ‘not stateds’, they are all considered potential AMEP clients.

Because of this difficulty in calculating the potential pool of onshore need, onshore reach data are not used in national reporting. DIMA is considering methods of improving the return rate of Settlement Information Forms, particularly response to the question on self-assessed English language ability.

DIMA is also investigating the possible use of the English Proficiency Index groupings as well as, or instead of, responses to Settlement Information Forms as the basis for calculating the potential pool of AMEP clients and, consequently, reach.

In addition, two other factors make any comparison of AMEP reach rates over time problematic. Firstly, the definition of reach changed with the implementation of the Immigration (Education) Act (Amendment) 1992 (Commonwealth). Before this, reach was defined as the proportion of those newly arrived immigrants with poor or no English who enrolled in the AMEP. The new arrangements brought into the enrolment process the need for new arrivals to register for the AMEP before enrolling in a learning activity, or before seeking a deferral of enrolment. Therefore, since 1992, reach has been defined as the proportion of those newly arrived immigrants with good, poor or no English who have registered for the AMEP. As a minor proportion of those who register does not proceed to enrolment in the AMEP, pre- and post-1992 reach rates cannot be compared. Once registered, the AMEP client has been ‘reached’. It is then up to providers to ensure the client eventually enrols and completes 510 hours, or attains ‘functional English’.

Another difficulty in comparing reach over time is that there have been major changes in the migration program in that significantly more immigrants now gain their visas onshore rather than offshore. The main onshore visa subclasses are for those granted protection status (the offer is good for up to ten years) and spouses who are required to enter Australia on a temporary visa until the stability of the relationship can be verified (usually after two years) after which permanent residence is granted. Quite typically, by the time they are granted permanent visas onshore, visa holders are relatively well settled in terms of employment. In any case, the major category—spouses—already qualify for access to the AMEP while on temporary visas. When finally granted visas onshore, grantees are therefore possibly less likely to regard learning English formally through the AMEP as a priority.
The following discussion of reach data needs to be read in the context of the limitations on measurement of reach discussed above. All tables referred to below are based on tables produced by the National Management Information Unit (NMIU) and are located at Appendix 3. All references are to immigrants and/or refugees whose visas were granted offshore.

**National reach since 1996**

In the period from 1996 to 1999, almost 250,000 immigrants were granted permanent residence visas offshore. Of these, over 127,000 (51%) were adults from a non-English speaking background (NESB). Some 75,000 NESB adults (58.8%) granted visas offshore had a need for English as defined by the Settlement Data Base and 78% of these registered in the AMEP.

Allowing for the limitations on comparing data across years, there appears to have been some decline in reach between 1996 and 1997. The reasons for such a decline are not clearly discernible from the data, although the reductions appeared greater for those countries of birth from which family category immigrants primarily originated. For example, reach for those born in China (mainly family category) seemingly declined from 81% to 72% and then rose to 82%; similarly reach for Vietnamese declined from 76% to 69%, and rose somewhat to 72%. Yet for those born in the former Yugoslavia (as distinct from those citing country of birth as either Serbia, Bosnia or Croatia), reach for what is primarily a humanitarian category also declined, but only marginally from 90% to 88% to 90%, while for Iraqis it went from 84% in 1996 to 83% in 1997 and dropped further to 77% in 1998.

There has been some speculation from some ethnic communities that a decline in reach in the family category was due to the introduction in 1996 of a two-year waiting period for access to income support (applying to all non-humanitarian categories). However, this can only be speculation in the absence of any research done on the impact of that policy and does not explain the rise in reach experienced by many communities after 1997.

**Reach by visa category**

Typically, Australia has targeted its humanitarian program to areas of the world where war, civil disturbance or manifest political or ethnic persecution has occurred, and these areas have not included the major English-speaking source countries. Whether refugees and other humanitarian entrants have come from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the 1970s, or Iraq, the Horn of Africa or the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, they typically have had little or no English. Therefore, a significant majority of humanitarian program entrants granted visas offshore (95%) have a need for English and almost all (89%) register for the AMEP. In the period in question, 79% went on to enrol in the AMEP.

All other offshore visa categories had lower reach rates, ranging from 75% for skilled immigrants (mainly the Australia-linked skills category—the former concessional family category) and 72% for the small 'other' category, to 68%
for temporary entrants and as low as 57\% for the preferential family visa category.

As Table 1 see p 90 (Appendix 3) shows, in absolute terms, the AMEP primarily comprises clients with humanitarian or family visas. The importance of English proficiency if one is to qualify for migration through the other visa categories means that relatively few skilled, temporary or other entrants need to register for the AMEP. However, the functional English of arrivals in these latter categories should not be over-stated: the combined totals of skilled and temporary visas issued offshore to applicants with a need for improved English, is higher than the number in the humanitarian category.

Reach by sex and age

There are more females migrating to Australia than males and more females in the AMEP than males. Since 1996, some 132 000 females have received offshore visas compared to 117 000 males. A clear majority of these females, 55\%, were NESB adults whereas only 46\% of males were NESB adults, thus indicating a greater likelihood of females needing to acquire English. This is, in fact, the case as 65\% of NESB adult females are deemed to have less than functional English compared to 51\% of NESB adult males, or 59\% of all NESB adults visaed offshore.

Despite more females needing English, males visaed offshore had a markedly higher reach rate (83\%) than did females (74\%). However, as more NESB adult females entered Australia during this period, females comprise some 60.5\% of all AMEP clients visaed offshore.

As Australia’s migration criteria place considerable emphasis on younger, skilled families, it is not surprising that over half of all settlers (52.3\%) are under the age of 30. A considerably smaller proportion of NESB adults (36.8\%) visaed offshore are under 30 (largely because a high proportion of the total settler cohort is under 20 years of age), and a further 34\% are aged between 30 and 40 years. A mere 7\% are aged over 60 years. It is therefore logical that most AMEP offshore visaed clients are aged between 20 and 40 years, providing some 64.1\% of all AMEP registrations of those visaed offshore.

Age/sex groups amongst offshore visaed immigrants exhibiting significantly higher than average (ie 78\%) reach rates are:

- males aged between 30 and 39 (95\%), probably reflecting recognition of the importance of functional English to employment;
- males aged 20 to 29 years (88\%) and 40 to 49 years (87\%);
- females in the 30 to 39 year old group (83\%).

Even males aged 50 to 59, with a reach rate of 79\%, are marginally above the average.
Of more concern in terms of targeting are the very low reach groups which are primarily:

- females over 60 years (44%);
- both males and females under the age of 20 (51%)—perhaps because they are small in number and ill at ease in adult classes;
- males over 60 years (60%).

Almost all other age groups of both sexes recorded reach rates between 67% and 76%.

**Reach by country of birth**

Table 2 (Appendix 3) represents the reach rates for offshore arrivals by country of birth for the four years between 1996 and 1999. There is potential for the 1999 reach figures to be slightly understated as the data was extracted in mid-2000, and clients who arrived in 1999 will have continued to register during the remainder of 2000. The three major groups of settlers with an English language need over the four-year period are from China (15,926 potential clients), the former Yugoslavia (7,207 potential clients) and Vietnam (6,539 potential clients).

These settlers are followed by a second tier of high need groups from Iraq, Bosnia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Taiwan, the former USSR, Croatia and Hong Kong. The third tier of high need groups, recording less than 2,000 potential clients over the four years, are from Indonesia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Iran, Sri Lanka, Macedonia and India. All other groups recorded less than 1,000 adults with an English need over the four-year period.

Based on the 1996–99 national offshore reach figures, these top 19 countries represent 82% of the potential total need and 82% of the total AMEP registrations. The main groups with a high reach rate are primarily those with high proportions of humanitarian category immigrants. These are listed in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Percentage of settlers with an English need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Yugoslavia</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former USSR</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Main groups with a high reach**

The fact that Table 3 includes four out of the top five source countries (and six out of the top ten) lifts the overall reach average to 78%. The other 12 major source countries have reach rates lower than the average of ‘all other countries’, which is 75.6% over the four years.
Interestingly, the main low reach groups within the top 19 source countries include some countries in which English is widely spoken (as well as some ‘humanitarian’ source countries). It is possible that such settlers underestimated their English proficiency or that, although they had stated a need, this need dissipated on arrival. However, a number of respondents to this study argue that English proficiency can also be overestimated, particularly where the variety of English differs from Australian English, and that AMEP attendance may involve loss of status. Alternatively, these non-registrants may include disproportionately the spouses of English-speaking settlers who cater to their informal translating/interpreting needs. Table 4 lists the low reach countries amongst the top 19 source countries. Turkey (73.9%) and Afghanistan (75.2%) with reach rates only marginally below the average for all other countries, complete the list of the top 19 source countries.

For whatever reason they exhibit a lower reach rate, these groups could well be targeted by promotional strategies. Within the diminishing flow of new ‘need’ reflected in the 1999 figures, readers will note that some countries are proportionately more important than they were in earlier years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Percentage of settlers with an English need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Low reach countries amongst the top 19 source countries

State and Territory target groups

Some of the low reach groups mentioned above are concentrated in specific States and Territories. For the information of service providers, those groups with both low reach and significant numbers with a stated English need are listed below, as well as those groups with high absolute numbers of non-registrants over the four-year period. The information from which these lists are derived was provided by DIMA.

New South Wales

Low reach: Philippines, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, Korea and Macedonia

Other large numbers of non-registrants: China, Vietnam, Iraq, former Yugoslavia and Bosnia
Victoria
Low reach: Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Lebanon, Macedonia and India

Other large numbers of non-registrants: China, Vietnam, former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Turkey, former USSR and Sri Lanka

Queensland
Low reach: Philippines, Hong Kong, Germany and Japan

Other relatively large numbers of non-registrants: Taiwan, China, and Vietnam

Western Australia
Low reach: Philippines, Indonesia and former USSR

Other relatively large numbers of non-registrants: China, Vietnam and former Yugoslavia

South Australia
Low reach: Philippines, Germany and Hong Kong

Other relatively large numbers of non-registrants: Vietnam, China, former Yugoslavia and Kampuchea

In the smallest States/Territories, very low numbers (1.6% of total need and 1.8% of AMEP registrations) preclude any meaningful analysis. Of the more significant source countries, Vietnamese in the ACT and Filipinos in both Tasmania and the Northern Territory have low participation rates in the AMEP.

Differing Perceptions of the AMEP

Before moving on to the substance of this study, it is important to realise that like all government programs, the AMEP means different things to different people, and these differences are reflected in the responses the researchers received from different categories of respondents.

DIMA

For departmental staff, the AMEP falls into the broad category of an immigrant settlement program. It is a key element in gaining broad community acceptance for the immigration program, with a proud 50-year history.

DIMA staff are dedicated to meeting program objectives consistent with the recently changed program guidelines. DIMA is also adjusting, as are providers, to the more commercial and competitive environment created by the reduced pool of prospective AMEP clients and the revised delivery arrangements.
Providers

Delivery of the program is in the hands of a mix of public and private providers—the successful tenderers for AMEP funding—with whom periodic program management meetings are held. Flexible delivery of the program in ways which could increase reach locally is the responsibility of different providers in each State and Territory, with the program being managed nationally from Canberra. The ability of the new group of service providers to respond to the needs of specific groups has yet to be systematically evaluated.

For providers, the AMEP is a commercial activity that they have successfully tendered for and manage in accordance with their contractual obligations. Providers have a vested interest in increasing reach in order to increase their income through payments from DIMA. Attempts to increase reach need to be taken as commercial decisions which may or may not prove fruitful, unless they attract a sufficient number of new clients to justify any additional costs involved. Providers also rely on DIMA to provide them with information on the current and future numbers, background and location of new clients, and to be responsive to their need for flexibility in the delivery of the program.

Providers may find themselves helped or hindered by other government agencies whose priority for placing prospective students in employment as soon as possible, for instance, is sometimes perceived as being at variance with AMEP objectives.

Welfare and community agencies

For Migrant Resource Centre staff, representatives of the various ethnic communities, and other government and voluntary organisations to whom the researchers spoke, the AMEP is only a part, and generally a minor part, of their day-to-day activities. They generally recognise learning English as an essential element in the successful settlement process and eventually as being necessary for active participation in the Australian community. Nonetheless, they report AMEP’s prospective and current clients as being confused and stressed, not only by immediate settlement needs, concerns about childcare and family reunion, but also by the ever-present tension between improving their English (and consequently their future employment prospects), and the priority they give to finding immediate employment.

However, the issues handled by many of our welfare agency respondents day in and day out unsurprisingly encompass advice on housing, health, employment, education, community and family relations, family reunion, legal issues, and the like. Because of the relative paucity of their involvement with AMEP, quite a few respondents conceded that their comments were necessarily anecdotal, and in many cases influenced to some extent by their personal experience as past clients of the AMEP.
Current and potential client groups

The impossibility of tracking down significant numbers of potential clients and securing reliable statements from them means that few of their viewpoints are directly represented in this report. Instead, the authors have relied mainly on the views of DIMA, providers, community groups and welfare agencies as to why some potential clients do not access the AMEP, taking into account all the limitations associated with making generalisations about such a widely diverse cultural, social and economic group.

Among the current and potential AMEP clients interviewed, there was unanimous agreement on the vital importance of English for successful settlement, but there were differing priorities and expectations relating to the AMEP. Some of these related to the competing settlement pressures reported by welfare and community agencies, but there were also significant cultural factors affecting clients’ access to and perceptions of the AMEP. Factors such as teaching styles, discipline, composition of classes, gender, age and child care were often cited, as were practical issues such as transport and timetabling.

As with community agencies, levels of understanding of the AMEP varied from person to person and were greatly influenced by their own experience and that of their family and friends. In many cases, there was clear evidence of confusion and misunderstanding as to entitlements and processes.

The authors have used abbreviations, P for providers, WCA for welfare and community groups and MRC for Multicultural Resource Centre, to identify the source of these key perspectives when quoting otherwise anonymous respondents.

Report structure

The remaining chapters in this report deal with four major areas:

*Chapter 2: Information flows and bottlenecks* addresses sources of information available to clients before departure for Australia and on arrival.

*Chapter 3: Initial settlement needs and impediments to access* discusses the competing priorities faced by immigrants and the key obstacles to their accessing AMEP as identified by respondents.

*Chapter 4: Program delivery constants and options* looks at why some of the standard AMEP offerings may not attract clients who prove hard to reach and describes some better targeted approaches.

*Chapter 5: Needs of specific groups* identifies some ways in which AMEP offerings might be made more attractive or cater better for client groups with particular needs.
Pre-migration information

They may get the information, but they are not listening for it at the time. Other priorities take over.

(WCA)

Information about clients' entitlement to the AMEP is attached to the visa approval letter which applicants receive. After information under 14 other headings (such as Australia's multicultural society, Money and Banking, Transport, Housing and Schools) the attachment, Form 994i, titled 'Settlement information for migrants to Australia', includes information, in English, on the AMEP. It also refers readers to the DIMA enquiry line (131 881) and home page address http://www.immi.gov.au.

While recognising the importance of these other topics, it seems somewhat incongruent that DIMA's own programs, MRCs, AMEP, TIS (the Translating and Interpreting Service) and 'Help for humanitarian program entrants', are the last entries in the document. In fact, the MRC entry refers to their 'helping to join English language classes' and refers readers to the addresses of MRCs on the last page of the document. This reflects a possible conflict of interest between the MRCs' role as providers of some ESL classes and AMEP providers, whose addresses are not given. In order to increase the AMEP's reach, there is a case for describing AMEP early in this text on the grounds that refugees and those who have family in Australia may expect support in handling many of these other matters, but not recognise the importance of English. This is particularly important if they find reading English a struggle and they are unlikely to persevere to the end of this quite dense and detailed document.

Among those interviewed, there was a perceived lack of consistency between the different overseas posts as to the amount of information and type of advice received by applicants. In some cases this perception may be based on experience of procedures and information which are no longer applicable. At any rate, such print information was perceived to be of very limited value, especially as it was only provided in English and tended to be addressed to only one member of the household, the principal visa applicant. It was often forgotten, overtaken by more urgent priorities on arrival, such as locating adequate housing and employment.
It was suggested by several agencies and AMEP clients that rather than simply attempting to provide a great deal of information, the focus should be on effectively communicating the importance of learning English for successful settlement, the need to register within three months of arrival and providing some pointers to key information and referral points.

While several providers report good relations with their local MRCs, others question their provision of conversation classes and trends towards more formal English teaching. The suggestion that the role of the MRCs as the AMEP referral point be reinforced gives rise to further potential for conflict of interest:

> *At embassies, they should motivate people to learn some English before they come, or at least provide information about the AMEP in ways that are more attractive. People really need some counselling on the need and importance of taking up the 510 hours.*

(WCA)

More effective modes of information suggested included a multilingual, colour-coded information package, and more attractive, practical ways of reminding potential clients of the need to register on arrival:

> *It would be really useful if DIMA produced a short checklist of actions required on arrival that could be used as a fridge magnet. It could list things such as opening a bank account, enrolling children, registering for AMEP and obtaining a driver’s licence. By being clearly visible to all in the household, it would be a clear reminder, and in this way everyone’s responsibility.*

(WCA)

A generic video with voice over in applicants’ first language was also recommended as an effective means of introducing people to the AMEP. A number of providers have already developed introductory videos in a range of languages (eg the AMES in Victoria and NSW and the ACL, in NSW, have recently produced short promotional videos in English and a number of relevant community languages), and these could be adapted to produce a more generic version.

The use of the Internet, and in particular greater utilisation of the DIMA website, was suggested as an increasingly viable avenue for providing advice both offshore and onshore. The website, while providing basic information, was not considered particularly user-friendly, especially for those with limited English. To more fully exploit its potential, the site would need to be more actively publicised, regularly updated, and made available in English as well as relevant languages. Because of the nature of the medium, such information could easily be multi-layered, providing greater levels of specificity as required (eg location and contact details for providers, range of course offerings etc).

The format and content of any resources developed would need to be carefully checked for accuracy as well as cultural appropriateness. For
example, a number of community workers commented that many immigrants were unaware either of the need to register within three months, or of the possibility of extension. Similarly, many were unaware of the change in delivery arrangements and the range of available providers. Realistic, culturally appropriate depictions of the AMEP and learning expectations would be useful in promoting the program, and in indirectly addressing some fears and concerns relating to issues such as age and child care.

Specific resources focusing on preparing applicants for migration were strongly recommended by community groups, both in terms of language and other settlement issues. A number of organisations commented favourably on the Pre-Departure English Language and Cultural Orientation Program, which was piloted in Belgrade by the International Office of Migration at the end of 1998 for 200 prospective immigrants. Community workers reported that clients attending this course were much more aware of their entitlements, seemed more informed and in control of their lives as a result, and therefore a lesser drain on support resources. Even so, the impact of the 1999 NATO air strikes on the anticipated level of participation in the pilot program and reporting on it, has led DIMA to conclude that its attempt at formal evaluation of the program is ‘too truncated to be conclusive’. (Julie Beattie, personal communication June 1999)

**Information on arrival**

Once in Australia, the most common source of information becomes word of mouth from family, sponsors and contacts within the particular ethnic community. As documented in previous research, such advice often lacks reliability and currency. It also tends to reflect the biases and experiences of earlier immigrants rather than current offerings, policies and practices. The following comment from a Vietnamese community worker in Sydney typifies these concerns:

> In the past, many more Vietnamese came out as refugees and went to centres, where they were a more captive audience, and got more support and information about services, learnt English, and this helped them to settle in better. Many people now come out as sponsored migrants, go to live with migrants who don’t know much either, often become protected from the English speaking world, especially in Cabramatta where there is no need for English. DIMA needs to emphasise ethnic media, radio, newspapers, as well as ethnic community workers to pass on information on settlement issues as well as AMEP. Otherwise, you get a chain reaction, a vicious circle, where children grow up in households where there is little English and little understanding of Australian culture, and it leads to conflict.

With the significant changes that have occurred in delivery of the AMEP, there was clear evidence of increased confusion regarding the range, quality and type of AMEP courses and services available. This confusion was evident not only among prospective clients and their informants, but
also among community organisations responsible for providing such advice. During consultations, for example, several community workers were unclear or made erroneous statements about the range of courses offered by particular providers (e.g., availability of child care, evening courses, etc.). Similarly, some providers reported that their local MRC and local community organisations were confused over boundaries, categories and eligibility criteria. This influences which settlers they refer.

The increased range of providers has also meant a greater need for community organisations and key informants to become familiar with new personnel, functions and services. There were significant variations in the degree to which different organisations had kept pace with the changes and their implications for prospective AMEP clients. This issue is closely related to promotion and marketing strategies adopted by providers and will be discussed in greater depth in the next section.

Another critical issue is the importance accorded to learning English by family and sponsors, especially in areas of high concentrations of particular ethnic groups. As more than one provider pointed out, it is quite possible for some immigrants to function adequately and access most of the services they require in their first language. For some communities, learning English is perceived as an imposition and a threat to family relationships, especially if course offerings are not packaged in culturally appropriate modes, such as gender segregated, or bilingual classes. More male employment and vocational role-modeling could also be facilitated if male teachers were available to respond to any such demand.

Many of the learners in conversational classes had only accessed English tuition after several years’ residence, when their child rearing or work responsibilities/opportunities had eased—the latter often due to restructuring. Several mentioned the need to communicate with their children and grandchildren as a prime motivating factor.

The following recommendations draw on issues discussed elsewhere in this report (see for instance providers’ concerns about confusion regarding entitlements in the section ‘Marketing and publicity strategies’ later in this chapter).

**Recommendations**

1. That DIMA examine the feasibility of a systematic means of assisting community groups and individuals to readily identify whether or not individuals have AMEP entitlements (subject to assessment of fluency levels) through:

   - a new categorisation of visas so that all visas conferring an entitlement to AMEP registration have a simple, binary alphanumeric identifier: if the identifier is included in the visa category, it includes an AMEP entitlement, if not, there is none;
   - a study of the feasibility of expanding this approach to identify Special Preparatory Program entitlements within a new system;
• a review of actual practice by locally engaged staff in passing on the
standardised information provided to them.

2 That DIMA, in consultation with providers, develop a promotional
strategy, including a range of resources in key languages, promoting the
importance of learning Australian English for successful settlement, and
featuring the success of AMEP graduates. These materials should be
made available or given to applicants at the time of visa approval, posted
on the DIMA website and promoted through ethnic media (radio, TV and
print) as part of a national media campaign. The resources should be
checked for cultural appropriateness and include:
• an attractive package containing essential information and referral
points;
• focus on successful case studies from under-represented groups
explaining the attractiveness of pathways to improved English, and
ultimately employment and successful settlement;
• a generic video promoting the importance of learning English,
incorporating material made available by providers, and addressing
common misperceptions relating to the focus, methodology and
image of the AMEP.

3 That, where possible, arrangements should be made for groups of
illiterate immigrants to view a video in their own language pre-departure
and to receive oral advice on any questions they may have about their
AMEP entitlements and obligations as a result of their viewing the video.

4 That DIMA review annually the accuracy of material provided and the
adequacy of the budget allocated to promotional activities.

5 That DIMA assess the cultural appropriateness of the successful
Orientation Program conducted in Belgrade to other major immigrant
source countries, particularly those currently under-represented in the
AMEP, with a view to the possible introduction of such a program in
appropriate locations.

Community links, consultation and promotion

We try to be seen as a focus for the community, not just for
English classes.

(P)

Establishing links with students and the local community

Realising the importance of the first point of contact and word of mouth
referrals, a number of providers have invested considerable thought and
resources in ensuring their centres and initial assessment procedures are
welcoming. Bilingual counter officers are employed at several centres to
ensure that prospective clients can easily communicate their concerns and
obtain accurate information on their entitlements, child care, transport
issues and learning options. Some centres allow potential clients to visit
twice without enrolling to familiarise themselves with the centre and
different course offerings. Others hold, on regular occasions, Open Days or Information Days, to which students are encouraged to invite their friends and families.

Providers stressed the need to establish links with local communities and to be seen as a focal point for new arrivals, not merely an English tuition centre. As one centre manager put it:

*We try to be seen as a focus for the community, not just for English classes. So we allow students to use the computers, or fax, spend time here after classes. Recently, we had a health fortnight with invited speakers from different health centres, students were encouraged to bring their families, and we organised excursions to facilities such as a multicultural health centre. It was mutually beneficial for us and the health organisations, and of course our students. We will be running it again on a regular basis.*

There was general agreement from providers on the importance of ensuring that consultation, promotion and marketing strategies were tailored to particular contexts and communities, rather than just relying on formulaic approaches, or one-off events. The following comments from the manager of one large community-based provider were typical of many providers’ experience:

*We found that strategies for reach do not necessarily transfer to different communities or regions, it depends on the needs of ethnic communities, what opportunities are available. You need to get to know community workers, and how stretched they are. Word of mouth is very effective, as is using key informants in the community.*

Numerous examples of ongoing liaison and promotional activities with local communities were cited. These included:

- hosting or sponsoring of community events;
- joining and hosting interagency meetings;
- allowing community groups to use centre facilities for functions;
- physical co-location of centres with other community agencies;
- using key people from ethnic communities as guest speakers or to present certificates at graduation ceremonies;
- attending citizenship ceremonies;
- staffing a stand at local festivals.

Both providers and community workers commented on the vital importance of maintaining a high profile and ongoing links in the local community, both to contribute and obtain feedback on service provision. This was particularly crucial for new providers who needed to establish themselves in the local community, and build rapport, sometimes in an atmosphere of suspicion and resentment. The involvement of providers in
interagency forums, for example, was identified as particularly useful in facilitating the exchange of information, early troubleshooting, and helping to plan more effective and responsive service delivery. Perceptions of key organisations varied but generally included State housing departments, local schools, baby health centres, religious centres, material support agencies such as St Vincent de Paul, local councils and chambers of commerce. More informal links with multicultural businesses and restaurants were also perceived as useful in publicising courses and obtaining referrals.

Several centres have attempted to formalise student feedback by offering exit counselling or asking students to report on reasons for others’ non-attendance. While community workers and some students welcomed the opportunity for feedback and input, the more direct initiatives were criticised by a number of community workers on cultural and ethical grounds. As the following comment indicates, students are typically more comfortable providing feedback informally, to an independent intermediary rather than directly to the teachers or provider concerned. This was evidenced by the number of comments received from students consulted during this project who perceived the researchers as being such intermediaries.

Students don’t like saying negative things, and they use the counsellor as an intermediary to say what they don’t like, such as the repetition of materials in subsequent levels of the course; materials for on-arrival and on-going classes are now rigorously separated.

Similarly, client communities tend to value reliable, personal relationships above a superficial, mercenary relationship where organisational ‘representatives’ change constantly. From the consultations undertaken, the authors gained the impression that there were significant variations in providers’ profiles and links with local communities not only between different providers, but also between different regional offices of the same provider. Effective community relationships cannot be developed overnight, and are unlikely to be productive unless managers are consistently committed to their development.

Significant marketing, service delivery and feedback opportunities may have been lost by some providers as a result of lack of attention to this community liaison and promotion role. Some centres have designated personnel with marketing and community liaison functions, whereas others integrate these roles as part of managers’ responsibilities.

In order to win the hearts and minds of clients and their communities, these consultations should not be the exclusive preserve of ‘community liaison officers’ however the latter are designated. Other service providers, banks and lawyers, for example, recognise that in the hierarchical societies which provide Australia with many of its immigrants and refugees, senior community members would value dealing with other organisations’ senior managers when representing their communities in quasi-formal settings.
The authors recognise however that community consultation and liaison is a two-way process. As Ross Tzannes, Senior Deputy Chairperson, of (Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia) observed: (1999:20)

The community too must play a crucial part. The ethnic communities have a particular responsibility to encourage, support, facilitate, and explain to their constituents the obligation of all newcomers to participate in these program [sic] and to positively embrace the challenges and opportunities offered. The wider community should recognise and welcome the benefits the program confers in terms of social harmony, productivity, development and civilisation in a world that is rapidly becoming a global village.

It was evident that ethnic communities and welfare agencies themselves could do more to inform themselves of the range of AMEP provision available, to provide direct feedback on its appropriateness, and to encourage potential clients to access their entitlements. While recognising that many of these potential clients were often facing a host of settlement challenges, and sometimes not in a position to add more stress by enrolling in an AMEP course, the isolation caused by lack of English was a major contributing factor to this stress.

**Links with schools and TAFE colleges**

According to a number of community workers, especially those involved with schools, more effective links could be developed with schools to link parents and teachers and to encourage students’ families to take up their AMEP entitlements. In some States employing community information officers, or operating Intensive Language Centres, a ready but currently under-utilised mechanism exists for disseminating such information. A number of schools successfully host community classes for parents during or after school hours, and there is clear potential for extending reach through similar types of provision.

Closer liaison and referral processes with TAFE were also identified as necessary by several providers and community agencies, given the complex conditions of student eligibility. Due to the lack of rigorous screening processes, potential AMEP students have reportedly too easily enrolled in TAFE courses and struggled with the English requirements, or been refused enrolment without referral to the appropriate AMEP provider. At a local level, joint enrolment and assessment days would be a useful way of dealing with this situation. However, given the large number of potential TAFE enrolments, such a proposition may not be realistic without preliminary screening and culling of applicants.

**Marketing and publicity strategies**

They need to be told why they should learn English for the long-term future effects on family and settlement.

(WCA)
Many respondents agreed that more attention needed to be paid to publicity for the AMEP. Providers naturally tended to focus on what DIMA might do in this area to improve reach, whereas most community groups and agencies were less concerned with ‘who pays’ than with the medium and particularly the content of the message.

Marketing and publicity strategies used by providers tend to be generally limited to print media, and are often in English. Letter box drops for example were reported as useful by some providers if they are carefully targeted to areas of high turnover and recent arrivals. More typically, pamphlets advertising courses are distributed through community centres and libraries. Providers also make use of ethnic and local press (radio, TV, newspapers) to promote the benefits of the AMEP through the use of advertorials and promotional interviews.

As mentioned earlier in this report, some providers have recently developed promotional videos in English as well as a range of other community languages. These videos outline different course offerings, pathways and expectations as well as the actual enrolment process. They were perceived by providers and community agencies as useful marketing and promotional tools that could be widely disseminated.

A number of providers pointed out that the concern about whether prospective students had arrived on the ‘right’ category of visa to entitle them to register for AMEP was counter-productive. It added unnecessarily to confusion about AMEP entitlements while disregarding the reality that most providers could place newcomers in, or direct them to, English classes appropriate to their needs irrespective of their visa category, or their existing English proficiency.

One welfare agency representative strongly argued for a ‘one-stop shop’ to provide advice on English language learning options. Such an arrangement would need to be independent of all educational and training bodies and might be located in Centrelink.

Perceived need for English

One of the key issues identified with publicity and marketing was a concern that many potential students saw little advantage in learning English in terms of their priority for finding employment. As an Asian community organisation observed:

_In our organisation’s experience, the attitude of people from lower socio-economic groups is that ESL has no positive impact on their job prospects. Much more advertising of success is needed to counteract this view._

This need is being addressed by DIMA at the AMEP website, which includes biographic snapshots of a range of immigrants who attribute their successful settlement and prosperity in Australia to the AMEP. When this report was drafted, examples included:
• Miroslav Sipek, Australian national rifle coach (Bosnia)
• Andrew Rastiwicki, company manager, scientific instruments company (Poland)
• Betty Hansens, shop manager (Indonesia)
• Iqbal Khalidi, torture and trauma counsellor (Afghanistan)
• Kinga Rypinska, artist (Poland)
• Albert and Piroska El-Syoufi, printer and childcare worker (Lebanon and Chile)
• Emmanuel Droukman, journalist and photographer (Ukraine).

Clearly, any publicity which is based on success will need to ensure that it finds culturally appropriate ways of encouraging the most ‘unreached groups’ to provide role models as a part of the publicity. The authors noticed that no Chinese or Vietnamese AMEP graduates featured in the above list, and are pleased to note that since then DIMA has added role models from a still greater range of countries, including China and Vietnam:

• Idris Ali Merdan, interpreter (Iraq)
• Tamara Filatov, artist (Kazakhstan)
• Borislav Zdralic, journalist (Bosnia)
• Chika Scally, administrative assistant (Japan)
• The Chan family (China)
• Anya Celzner, accountant (Bosnia)
• Thanh and Anh Lam, tailors (Vietnam)
• Jian Ping Zhang, engineer (China)
• Mirsada Sipek, nurse (Bosnia)
• Thao Nguyen, childcare worker (Vietnam).

These new client success stories have been written, and a broader range of clients included, with a view to producing a sequel to *Journeys: stories from the Adult Migrant English Program* and for publication elsewhere as the opportunity presents, including the DIMA website. DIMA intends to have these stories translated and will also be ‘refreshing’ the stories over time, so that there is a reasonable turnover and as broad a representation of clients as possible.

The regular promotion of success stories was perceived by community workers and clients as being more effective than merely factual information in encouraging potential students:

> Many people’s only access to the outside world is through ethnic radio. Success stories are really useful in helping people to see how others have made the effort and it’s been worthwhile. For example, one of our group has just managed to have his qualifications recognised and get a job after two years of hard study.

(client focus group)
Another provider suggested such success stories could be shown on video, or translated and shown on SBS television to good effect. One provider suggested a follow-up study of AMEP graduates to provide an empirical basis for promoting training and employment pathways provided by the program:

*If the study found that 75% of our graduates found employment, it would have a big impact, as would even 50%.*

Respondents’ comments emphasised that as part of its continuing process of reviewing and developing its website and other promotional material, DIMA should include not only translations of the current information provided on the AMEP in key languages, but also a broad range of promotional material stressing the importance of learning English. Suggestions include a broad range of case studies of students who have been successful, excerpts from the promotional video, examples of different types of courses and responses to frequently asked questions (FAQs) reported by individual overseas posts.

During 2000, DIMA totally redesigned and redeveloped its website, with a major focus on client information, which is now available on the website in 18 languages: Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese simplified, Chinese traditional, Croatian, Farsi, Indonesian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Russian, Serbian, Somali, Spanish, Thai, Turkish and Vietnamese. The website also includes multilingual information on the Home Tutor and Distance Learning Scheme. People can also order AMEP information products directly from the site (English or multilingual versions, according to their requirements). As described above, the site also includes a broader range of client success stories than was previously the case. The site address is www.immi.gov.au/amep.

DIMA has since produced a new client brochure: *Australia’s Adult Migrant English Program: we can help you learn English*. This brochure, produced in June 2000, promotes the importance of learning English for successful settlement and provides information on entitlements, deferrals, service providers, and also quotes from four clients (from China, Sudan, Afghanistan and Poland) on the importance of learning or improving their English/their experience of the AMEP. The brochure should make a very important contribution to improving the understanding of AMEP entitlements and requirements if it can be distributed to its target audience. The brochure is produced in the above 18 languages and is also reproduced on the DIMA website, in all 18 languages.

Respondents highlighted a number of issues that relate strongly to the recurring theme of the overriding desire to find employment without delay. These need to be addressed in the publicity. Issues raised included:

- a preference for vocational courses, particularly for those who did not see any need for reading and writing, which AMEP did not respond to;
- an expectation that improved English was irrelevant to individuals’ employment prospects, given their skills, or lack of recognition of their qualifications;
• little or no evidence within communities that former graduates of the AMEP achieved any better employment outcomes than those who took any job they could find;
• failure to get across the message that the AMEP was not so much a DIMA program or an aspect of ‘settlement’, as a fundamental stepping stone in the ‘pathway’ towards improved English, vocational training, employment and economic independence.

A related issue concerns some potential students’ inaccurate assessment of their own proficiency. This was more marked with some nationalities. Educated Filipinos, Indians and Eastern Europeans were said to exaggerate their level of proficiency. However, one provider remarked that ‘rather than wanting to be advanced, [providers] find Asian professionals want to start at lower levels than they should in order to boost their confidence and make sure they are “right”.’

For more highly educated immigrants, such as those referred to above, AMEP publicity that emphasises the term basic may well prove a disincentive, unless they encounter someone who has benefited from the more advanced levels. Terms such as settlement or introductory English were said to be more appropriate than basic. Others suggested more strategic marketing of the AMEP as part of a pathway into higher levels of ESL and vocationally oriented English. Such an approach would also go some way to addressing a perception by certain community groups that the AMEP provides a level of English suited to housewives rather than business people.

For clients from countries where education is delivered in another variety of English (eg the Indian sub-continent), publicity may need to address the variation in Englishes now spoken around the world. Embarrassment may be avoided if AMEP publicity makes it clear that learning to cope with Australian English is not unique to non-English speakers and graduates from any one part of the world, and is important for doing well at interviews and finding employment.

These impediments can be addressed at the pre-departure assessment stage by improved, targeted publicity to new arrivals, or by seeking to ensure that all new arrivals are encouraged to seek counselling from a provider and assessment of their ‘Australian English’/‘further English’ options, through improved coordination with employment agencies.

Publicity should also address the less formal teaching style adopted in Australia and portray it as suited to adults, and personally rewarding, so that it is not seen as either threatening by those with low educational standards, or babyish by those of relatively advanced educational background.

The authors assume that most providers have mechanisms in place to periodically review the effectiveness of their community consultation and promotion systems. However, low registrations, together with responses
from community groups and agencies, indicate that improvement is needed in identifying priorities.

**Recommendations**

6 That providers allocate sufficient resources to ensure ongoing systematic liaison with and feedback from key local communities and review annually:

- the effectiveness of their initial contact and assessment procedures;
- their consultative mechanisms, in terms of:
  - the numbers and types of community groups and agencies consulted;
  - the frequency and manner of and criteria for measuring effectiveness of consultation;
  - relationships with local TAFE (Technical and Further Education) colleges and schools in respect of referrals, with a view to exploring the establishment of joint initiatives and opportunities for extending reach.

7 That DIMA commission a study to identify cases of students successfully accessing employment and training pathways as a result of their enrolling in the AMEP to be used in publicity, promotion, website, brochures, etc.
Chapter 3

Initial settlement needs and impediments to access

Employment or improved English—the perception of an inescapable choice

The underlying theme is that most people eligible for AMEP classes in the categories which are under-registered are severely economically disadvantaged.

(WCA)

Whether students are illiterate or highly educated, both categories really like to find work.

(WCA)

Almost everyone would attend classes if they could afford to forgo income.

(WCA)

Most providers recognise the competing demands of priorities faced by immigrants and refugees. However, welfare agencies and community groups indicated that for some new arrivals, the need to find accommodation and employment and to cater for the educational and psychological needs of children and the family unit were in direct competition with the time and energy required to attend AMEP, not to mention committing the necessary concentration to learning a new language.

There was hardly a category of potential student which community groups and welfare agencies did not portray as experiencing a constant tension between the need for immediate income and the deferred benefits of learning or improving English. The only exception to this general rule were arguably those mothers of larger families whose competing priorities focused on parenting responsibilities. Realistically, they did not see themselves as being available to undertake employment as long as they had children to care for at home. This view was said to apply also to single refugee mothers.
Financial hardship was identified as a major factor for new arrivals, whether they were refugees, or spouse or family reunion immigrants with no entitlement to income support for two years. One provider identified spouse categories in particular, as did a community group:

In the case of change of status onshore, potential students don’t see the need to rush out and learn English as they are already part of the society. If they already have a job they will not sacrifice—or endanger—it.

A Migrant Resource Centre related several instances of potential AMEP clients obtaining employment as outworkers, or returning home after months of unsuccessfully trying to make ends meet, under the false impression that they could ‘wait out’ the two-year period overseas. Another community group of refugees explained that not only were they struggling to survive and establish themselves in a new country, with little support, but they also had obligations to send money back to family subsisting in refugee camps. One of the group complained about having to pay $20 for an English textbook, which he subsequently found out was freely available from the local library.

When struggling to meet basic needs, the loss of the AMEP entitlement is assumed to be part of the price that must be paid:

Lately marriage is the highest migration category for Lebanese, with the related assurance of support. On arrival everyone knows that they have a two-year waiting period for any social security support and they have a debt to the family to repay, nor do they wish to have to live with in-laws. They have to find a job and lose their 510 hours ‘automatically’. If the entitlement extended beyond two years, there would be a sharp rise in enrolments [sic].

(WCA)

In the specific case of potential clients from Indonesia, respondents stated that those who are unable to sell overseas businesses need to maintain levels of income from overseas by returning frequently to Indonesia to keep the business running.

As more than one agency explained, the impact of the two-year waiting period for social security payments is a major issue for family reunion category arrivals as they cannot expect to live off the generosity of family for long. For instance, in the case of Indian immigrants ‘their limited savings dwindle very rapidly’ such that they depend on welfare organisations if they cannot find a job. Ethiopians and Afghans, too, were identified as needing to give priority to employment in order to repay debts within the family.

Similarly, several agencies, referring specifically to the Chinese community, remarked that where there is an AMEP entitlement people like to get a job straight away, and question the return on the investment of time and effort needed to attend AMEP classes:
They do not see many fellow-countrymen getting a better job as a result, and language learning is not easy.

Their savings go towards the rent; their concerns are with making a living. So employment is the first priority as, culturally, there is a strong work ethic. Social security is not available and not desired.

From a provider’s viewpoint, one of the greatest difficulties is:

...prising eligible students away from employment: either small business where they cannot easily be replaced/given time off, or making good money working intensively four days a week.

Better links to Centrelink/Migrant Resource Centres

For providers, relationships with employment agencies can be seen as a service delivery coordination issue. However, for new arrivals, whose first priority is to find income through employment, an employment agency which urges ESL rather than providing employment may not be responding to client demand, unless it can provide some form of allowance to the learner. Unless providers reach potential students before they approach an employment agency, and can market the advantages of the AMEP, they will surely lose some proportion of clients.

Several providers referred to improved relations with Centrelink and job placement agencies. One provider attributed this to personal, coordinated contact between 40 or 50 of its teachers and the local Centrelink, Job Network and similar agencies, promoting AMEP and learning pathways; another major provider referred to involvement in forums such as interagencies. Nonetheless, there were several comments about competing objectives being a contradiction inherent in the ‘system’ and the need for continuing coordination with Centrelink. The principal difficulties identified relate to agency staff seeking to achieve targets for job placement programs without reference to AMEP entitlements, and to referring eligible students to other language and literacy courses before they have exhausted their AMEP entitlement:

There is a repeated problem in the conflict in policy goals between DIMA’s settlement and language learning goals and DETYA [Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs] and DEWRSB [Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business]/ Centrelink’s target of ensuring a constant flow of problem people on Newstart into a job, any job, as soon as possible. Under Flex 3 Intensive Assistance arrangements the employment agency is paid for an ‘outcome’ if a client is found work. Those who reach the end of their AMEP entitlement, too, may need and benefit from further literacy and numeracy training but can’t go on with ESL if a job is found for them. Similarly, they may lose childcare.
support and not be eligible for LITNUM if they receive parenting or
the partner allowance. The existence of these two regimes with
conflicting objectives creates great stress for students who are
keen to find employment, and need money but also recognise that
once they have lost their AMEP entitlement the chances of their
receiving further tuition in English are likely to be very limited.

Sometimes, people enrol in a part-time course because they are
unable to get into a full-time course, but then they are expected to
actively seek work. Also, English is an approved activity under
Newstart but there is no compulsion for people to do it.

(interagency focus group)

In some areas, employment agencies may need to be reminded
from time to time of the importance of adequate assessment of
English fluency and the need to take up the AMEP entitlement
while still eligible, particularly in preference to other courses.
While the 510 hours may not be enough to achieve a standard of
fluency required for employment, a subsequent course may build
on the AMEP. However, once ineligible for AMEP, the 510 hours
cannot be used to build on another course.

On the other hand, a welfare agency argued that some previously high
status people may regard welfare dependency as an option because others
they know in their community experience difficulty in finding skilled
employment, even if they persevere with English classes. The fact that they
are ineligible for further targeted ESL for two years after arrival means that,
on completion of their AMEP entitlement, any opportunity or motivation to
acquire more English with a view to employment is lost.

The conclusion, however, is the same, that is, that the AMEP and Centrelink
need closer linkages.

Other difficulties in settlement and employment coordination between and
across government programs and agencies were referred to by
respondents. These reflect in part the role of State governments in
delivering courses through State institutions and other Commonwealth
agencies’ competing objectives in the settlement process, over which DIMA
has no control. While there is a case for seeking greater coordination
nationally, it appears unlikely that other instrumentalities would be
prepared to give priority to the necessary policy changes or to commit
resources to bringing about significant administrative change as the
following cases demonstrate:

• older students, who complete their 510 hours without achieving
  functional English, need to be directed to numeracy and literacy
  courses; however, Centrelink would insist that at 52 they were too old;

• a provider observed that new arrivals, and in particular refugees, can
  move quite frequently in the first few months without giving providers a
  forwarding address and suggested greater liaison between housing
  departments, welfare agencies. Centrelink and AMEP providers as a way
  of overcoming this;
• a welfare agency, which was at least partly funded by DIMA and itself provided ESL classes, objected to the AMEP getting away from its core business by providing orientation information;

• another agency proposed that absences recorded by the provider be reported to a welfare agency for follow-up by a suitably cross-culturally trained social worker;

• a provider found that a local MRC wanted to run its activities at the same time as the provider’s classes (in the morning), when potential clients were more inclined to attend, and had to repeatedly negotiate to avoid clashes;

• a provider objected to some TAFE classes which do no testing of English levels, resulting in students enrolling in vocational courses they are not suited to, pointing out that universities, too, advertise aggressively for students, who may have an AMEP entitlement but are attracted to professional study without recognising the standard of English required, or anticipating that the university’s ‘remedial’ English and study centre-type offerings would suffice.

In the light of agencies’ frequently expressed concerns, providers may be able to increase reach by raising with DIMA, through their participation in Settlement Planning Forums, any options they see for:

• improving formal coordination of links between providers, Centrelink and other Commonwealth-funded agencies whose activities lie outside the control of providers;

• improving training of employment agencies’ staff in the importance of potential clients taking up their AMEP entitlement within the specified period.

### Childcare

_The government doesn’t seem to realise the extent of the need for young families. We offered a part-time course with childcare on the premises, we had 12–13 women and 30 kids on premises!_

(WCA)

The issue of childcare was clearly identified by all respondents as a major factor not only in enabling immigrants to access the AMEP, but also in facilitating settlement because of its socialisation and acculturation functions for both adults and children. For the vast majority of respondents, the lack of childcare constituted the most significant barrier to increasing reach, and effectively prevented those caring for young children from using their entitlement. It is clearly the area which needs most attention in improving reach for many women and, to a lesser extent, grandparents—both of which groups are currently under-represented in the AMEP.

DIMA publicity claims that ‘free childcare is available for AMEP students, either in childcare centres near AMEP venues or close to AMEP students’ homes’. This is a requirement in Departmental contracts with service...
providers. However, there seemed to be a real gap between official policy and actual practice with community groups unanimously observing that reach could be significantly increased with more adequate provision of childcare.

Indeed, the authors believe that providers and therefore DIMA may be unaware of the extent to which welfare agencies and community groups regard childcare as a major issue. Many community workers and potential clients complained of long waiting lists, up to eight months, or of the need for parents to forgo their entitlements or take turns in attending a part-time course. Conversely, wherever appropriate childcare was provided, attendance and student satisfaction rates were both highly rated:

Many Muslim women come to Australia to an arranged marriage, or with very young children. With the need to look after their husband and young children, they find it very difficult to attend courses without childcare. Many find their time has expired by the time the children are old enough and they are ready to enrol. I would have written about 50–60 letters explaining the delay in registering and requesting exemption for women in such circumstances.

We had difficulties reaching Khmer women, but once we offered a course with childcare at the local temple, we had a dramatic increase in enrolments.

These comments were regularly echoed by respondents who perceived one of the main attractions of community-based and conversational classes as being the provision of childcare and more child-friendly timetabling and location of classes. These factors were highly significant, they pointed out, not only for young families but also for many grandparents who often also had childcare responsibilities.

One large community provider subsidised childcare arrangements because they were seen to be serving a real community need. Another suggested that:

Childcare using background speakers would probably significantly increase reach in the region.

The provision of on-site childcare was seen as significantly preferable to off-site arrangements for practical reasons such as the difficulty of using public transport with young children, as well as to alleviate the anxiety of parents and children unaccustomed to the concept of childcare outside the family:

It is very difficult for these parents and grandparents to organise childcare off site, and they don’t feel comfortable leaving their babies and toddlers with strangers. They often don’t know what is available, and obviously don’t have the English to arrange it.
Now, with the new Centrelink regulations, there is also a limit on the hours that can be claimed, and many migrants find these childcare fees too high.

(Chinese interagency)

One of the keenest and most widely reported objections was to family day care. As a provider reports:

_There is suspicion/distrust of family day care and this may not be helped by the translation of the term—for which there may be no equivalent—ending up suggesting a very artificial arrangement like baby-sitting and lesser benefit to the child than a ‘government’ setup which sounds like schooling and suggests the child may pick up some English._

Another provider made the very positive suggestion that, given these barriers to the use of childcare centres, where mothers do not feel comfortable leaving their children:

_it is helpful if they can visit with an interpreter and talk about their child and ask questions; and even stay with their child for a few weeks to learn about how the place works._

Before arranging childcare, providers’ staff would be well advised to make contact with the 24-hour Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) to ensure that:

- they have up-to-date publicity material in appropriate languages, including information on how to obtain an interpreter card and the TIS number (telephone 13 14 50);
- they know how to arrange interpreted advice about the service for illiterate clients;
- they can arrange advice about booking an interpreter for an agreed time.

As the authors understand family day care to be the direction in which some providers are heading, reach trends need to be carefully monitored, all the more so as a number of providers rejected the suggestion that childcare is a problem, even citing the example of an individual mother with children who did manage to attend classes as evidence that it was not an issue.

Finally, the expectation that ‘recent arrivals with children over four years have to pay pre-school fees themselves which are prohibitive’ (WCA) is said to have an impact on reach which the authors are unable to quantify. However, given the widely-acknowledged impact of financial pressures on reach, it would be surprising if pre-school costs did not have an impact. DIMA and providers may wish to emphasise that childcare is available to children of pre-school age, including those over four years of age.

The authors understand that issues related to the importance of the ready availability of childcare are under active consideration by DIMA in the
context of a confidential report, *The Impact of Government Policy Changes on Child Care Costs in the AMEP* by John Cleary. Some of the difficulties identified are said to relate to increasing emphasis on requiring specified open space per child and shaded areas in central city areas. DiMA takes the view that any unsatisfied demand for childcare and waiting lists would not be remedied by increasing funding as this would not increase the number of places available in the light of these difficulties.

This said, in terms of impediments to increasing reach, the authors cannot over-emphasise the importance almost every one of their respondents attached to culturally appropriate, accessible childcare.

**Recommendations**

8 That, where possible, all childcare should be provided on site, or close to the AMEP centre.

9 That providers negotiate with their childcare managers to enable mothers to spend at least several days familiarising themselves with childcare arrangements and that such arrangements be suitably publicised to relevant community groups.

**Transport**

‘All travel is too costly’  
(WCA).

The extent of transport difficulties varies from State to State, but one of the main common factors is the financial hardship experienced by most prospective clients, and therefore the need for every extra dollar spent to be well justified.

Several welfare agencies point out that, across all groups, only one person in most households—the unemployed male in practice—will receive Newstart concessional travel entitlements; dependents, including the spouse, cannot therefore readily access distant classes as all travel is too costly. In addition, many of those women who are prepared to try to attend classes want to take their children with them and this is not catered for. Off-site childcare can involve additional transport costs.

In some communities, the elderly, and women in general, do not drive and are thereby additionally disadvantaged. One community group assesses such potential students as being unable to get any further than 1.5 to 2.0 kilometres from home. With perhaps several young children in tow and a return journey to make, this would be quite a feat for which one needs to be highly motivated.
Difficulties tend to discriminate against women with children: taking children to childcare and getting back in time after class to pick them up as well as any children from school, can make the whole AMEP attendance just too stressful.

(WCA)

Specific difficulties apply to outlying areas of major cities, such as Western Sydney or the City of Casey in Melbourne, or even Hobart where housing is typically more affordable but public transport is said to be inadequate and travel by bus expensive.

In several areas, providers have been able to arrange the bussing of students to classes or to an individual learning centre. In one instance a bus was provided through the good offices of a local ethnic community, but was only available for members of its own community. The provider concerned in this instance objects that its contract with DIMA is inflexible, believing that it does not cover its hiring or buying a bus to facilitate student access. DIMA may wish to examine whether this interpretation is correct and whether there is any valid objection to allowing greater flexibility.

In one State the local government’s transport concession (rail subsidy) was previously an issue as it was thought to be inappropriate for a ‘commercial college’, although available to other AMEP students. This has since been resolved. The best some providers can do to accommodate transport difficulties is to accept that some students can attend only some but not all sessions.

Any scheme for costs reimbursement would appear prohibitively expensive in terms of the added administrative costs. The authors have considered the feasibility of DIMA’s introducing some form of transport voucher system. However, the budget would presumably need to cover all AMEP clients, both current and prospective, not just clients who are ‘not currently reached’. Limitations which appear defensible could restrict eligibility to some category of ‘caregiver and child’ or ‘a specified minimal number of (pre-school) children’ (given that heads of households qualify for Newstart concessions), or those ‘ineligible for other Government transport concessions’. Any voucher would need to cover private bus systems as well. In Sydney, for instance, government buses do not operate further west than Auburn, and all Western and South Western Sydney AMEP regions are served by privately operated bus companies. Any such scheme would need to be administratively simple and equitable.

**Recommendation**

10 That DIMA consider options for introducing a transport voucher system for clients who do not qualify for other government assistance with transport, and a trial in one or more States.
Chapter 4

Program delivery
constants and options

Flexibility, more flexibility and still more flexibility

The suggestion made to community groups and welfare agencies, that most AMEP providers were doing everything they could to ensure entitlements were taken up, drew a range of responses, including a high level of agreement in one city. However, most responses revealed the challenge of providing the degree of flexibility that such bodies, who claim to know the mind of potential clients, believe is needed. At the broadest level, the issues were identified as being threefold.

Firstly, it was argued that the potential clients who are not currently being reached do not have the same needs as those who do register and enrol. In other words, providers cannot generalise from the problems current students allude to, because enrolled students have been able to cope, whereas those not reached do not cope. Secondly, it was argued that if providers were to prove more flexible, they would in fact attract sufficient numbers of new students to make their flexibility worthwhile, despite the fact that some providers were able to point to various attempts at flexibility which had gone unrewarded by viable enrolments over time. Thirdly, a key requirement was said to be a much more gradual introduction to formal learning for most of those learners who are hardest to reach.

In addition, some respondents focused on a need to make teaching materials and themes more narrowly relevant to settlement and employment needs. For example, one community suggested the development of an apprentice-based scheme, where people could be placed in workplaces for part of the time and learn English the rest of the week, as this would greatly assist them to learn English, develop vocational skills and possibly secure employment at the completion of the course. However, most respondents appeared to accept that language needed to be taught for a whole range of settlement and life skills, particularly for beginners, and could not be restricted to 'language for work'.

Even so, it may make working-age adults more amenable to formal language learning, and to speak more positively of their experience within their community, if the AMEP were portrayed more actively as employment related, or having a specific focus, rather than ‘settlement’ related. Different providers and community agencies reported, for example, that
courses developing computer skills or dealing with women’s health or parenting issues had been well received by students who also found it easier to commit themselves to these courses because of their shorter duration.

The rest of this chapter identifies the key areas in which flexibility is needed according to most respondents, and describes some providers’ creative approaches to increasing accessibility for potential clients. As this is an area in which needs are not the same for all groups across the country, what has worked in one State for one provider may have been tried unsuccessfully elsewhere. This perversely serves to reinforce the comment that ‘one size does not fit all’.

In order of perceived importance the interrelated problems included:

- childcare difficulties (this topic has already been discussed as an impediment to access, rather than a delivery issue);
- intensity, timing and duration of classes;
- ‘one in, all in’: inclusion of disparate types of learners in the same class;
- learners’ lack of confidence;
- non-availability of bilingual teachers or teacher aides.

**Intensity of classes**

*People with literacy problems in their own language need a slower introduction to learning, and something like 12 hours over an initial six weeks.*

(WCA)

*At the moment the only classes offered are from 9.30 am to 1.45 pm, four or five days a week.*

(P)

After childcare, the need for classes which ease students into the unfamiliar experience of learning another language was perhaps the unaddressed need most stressed by respondents other than providers. Complaints about the number of contact hours some providers expected students to attend was quite widespread, and referred most particularly to the concerns of ‘low reach’ categories—namely, illiterate students and those with little experience of formal education, allied in some cases to low motivation and expectation of success, as well as the elderly.

While it was not within the scope of this study to conduct a detailed analysis of class offerings, it was evident that these varied quite substantially from one provider to another within the range of three hours, three days a week (in a relatively high reach area) or 14 hours a week to a
‘standard’ 20 hours a week plus six hours of electives weekly. There is no doubt that a significant proportion, probably the majority, of students who are reached by the AMEP, want to take the fast track and attain proficiency suited to further study or employment and professional practice as soon as possible.

It is possible, however, that such ‘fast tracking’, while appealing to the majority of the clientele at any one time, may deter others. In the words of one provider which offers a great range of options: ‘reduced hour classes for low level clients are very popular’. Several welfare agencies reported students not coping with ‘five days in a row’ due to a range of settlement and personal factors, in addition to family and household responsibilities.

The fact that so many agencies and community groups raised the need for less intensive courses suggests, too, that publicity about the availability of such courses is not getting to those who would prefer a very slow approach. This may result in a vicious circle: the perceived emphasis on intensive courses deters some potential clients from overcoming their lack of confidence, consequently the level of demand is not made known to providers, and less intensive courses are not marketed to the extent necessary.

Many community organisations saw the Home Tutor Scheme, or the conversational classes some of them offered, as a confidence builder and bridge to the mainstream AMEP program, and could cite several instances of students graduating from these conversational classes to more intensive courses, once their confidence had developed. A number, in fact, suggested that systemic provision should be made for funding such conversational classes under the AMEP 510 hour entitlement.

Needless to say, low intensity offerings which extend beyond an introductory period risk confronting the AMEP requirement that entitlements be completed within the three years specified. This may be justified in settlement terms and a case for some intensity is arguable on language learning grounds; but whatever the justification, the standard offerings may not be attractive to a fair proportion of those not currently reached. As one community group asked:

We’d like to know what is the rationale for the 510 hour entitlement expiring after five years [sic]. Why should it? If people do not access their entitlement because of economic or family pressures, why shouldn’t they be able to access it later, or use it over 10 years if it suits them better?

Indeed, the possibility of Australia’s receiving increasing numbers of refugees, many of whom may be torture and trauma victims, and/or illiterate or have very limited literacy in their own language, would introduce a requirement for greater flexibility and, smaller and less intensive classes. Manifestly, the experience acknowledged by the Special Preparatory classes is that these involve much higher costs, but these need to be weighed against the longer term individual and social benefits gained.
If these issues are not further investigated and addressed, there is a danger of the quality of teaching and learning and the reputation of AMEP suffering over time. This could act to further reduce reach, particularly for those least convinced that they can learn, and become literate in, English, or that improved English will increase their employability.

**Timing and duration of classes**

Inappropriate timing of classes, particularly in terms of childcare needs and other family responsibilities, was frequently mentioned. There appears to be a broad consensus that classes in the morning are best for both women and men: for women because of a possible need for them to care for children in the afternoon and evening; and for men because they may have greater opportunities for unskilled employment (eg cleaning) and unpopular shift work in the afternoon and evening.

However, even where morning classes were available, some aberrant timing was mentioned. For instance, one respondent pointed out that an 8.45 am start clashed with the need to see children safely off to school. A provider in a different State remarked that classes which start about the time school commences and end shortly after a morning childcare session can make transport very difficult. Not surprisingly, ‘a class starting at 9.30 am rather than 9.00 am has been well received’.

There was a great deal of support from people associated with a number of community organisations, particularly Arabic ones, for classes around the middle of the day. While this may pose timetabling problems for providers and for teachers, it was alleged that many women, who are otherwise unable to attend, would like to attend AMEP classes about this time.

Community members surmised that classes were not run at these preferred times because providers did not have enough staff or classrooms to run concurrent classes that would overlap these hours. A further suggestion was made that Migrant Liaison Officers, acting on behalf of providers, possibly had no say in management decisions on timetabling and related matters as their role seemed to be restricted to advising what classes were available. Conversely providers’ managers were assumed to have little recent experience or understanding of the diversity of community needs. Otherwise these respondents could see no reason why midday classes were unavailable, as they were confident the unmet demand was sufficient to justify them. One welfare agency was adamant, and concerned, that no AMEP classes were provided within its area after working hours, but seemed to regard this as a lost cause.

Some providers had tried weekend classes but no longer offer them ‘as they never really got off the ground’, while others have also given up, or never offered, evening classes because the demand was thought not to exist. Instead, in one instance, students interested in evening classes are referred to another provider in the same area. Yet in large cities, such as Sydney, providers as well as community groups offered a range of evening and
Saturday classes and reported that both classes were very popular, as were those that fit in between school hours. In fact, one provider was contemplating offering Sunday classes in response to demand.

‘One in, all in’ methodology

_Mixed level classes are a waste of time for everybody. The pace of classes becomes a real problem: for many it is too slow and they get frustrated, or too fast and people get discouraged trying to keep up, and it leads to loss of face, especially for men or for older people._

(WCA)

There are two areas in which a ‘one in, all in’ approach is said to adversely impact on reach. At least one provider was under the impression that DIMA encourages the inclusion of fee-paying students, together with Australian students funded under literacy and numeracy programs, in the same class as AMEP students. The ostensible reason for this is that otherwise the provider concerned would not be able to maintain viable class sizes. Providers who do this insist that they have no difficulties in catering adequately to all of their clients.

Other providers, perhaps not constrained to make a virtue of necessity, are no less adamant that it is inappropriate to include English-speaking literacy and numeracy students in AMEP classes, on methodological and pedagogical grounds ‘as the curriculum used for each group is quite different’.

There is no such objection to fee-paying students making use of spare capacity in AMEP classes. Most such students have completed their 510 hours but require, and are prepared to pay for, further tuition.

It is difficult to see how students whose proficiency in English, by definition, is still being developed can benefit from the same type of instruction as native speakers of English, whose only need is to acquire literacy in their own language. This topic attracts strongly partisan views on either side. It would justify further, objective examination of both the sensitivities and real needs of potential AMEP students and their stated lack of confidence in their command not so much of written English, for which they may see little need, but of spoken English language.

The second area of concern to some communities is a perceived failure to differentiate between different types of learners. These include the illiterate and the highly educated at the extremes, but also males and females, young and elderly, people from high and low socio-economic status, and in a few instances, people from different racial groups or antagonistic communities. A clear distinction, for example, is made by some providers between learners' predicted capacities in terms of formal education: ‘courses are run in two streams—less than ten years formal education and an ‘all others’ stream’. Other providers appear not to make any such
distinction, relying exclusively on tested or self-assessed proficiency as the sole criterion for class placement.

The resulting disparity within such groupings inevitably places too many demands on some students and too few on others. It is important that groups currently under-represented in the AMEP are convinced of its value to them, and its ability to cater to their needs. Responses from client and community groups, where word of mouth reports carry a great deal of weight, clearly indicated more could be done in this area, with the following comments being typical of the concerns expressed:

Classes should be the same level because it causes embarrassment and frustration to students when they are mixed. Many Afghans, for example, who have been in refugee camps have missed out on formal education, so they have no English basis at all, sometimes no literacy skills; others are more educated, yet often they are lumped together, different literacy levels, age, familiarity with technology such as computers.  

(WCA)

Greater efforts could be made to identify sub-sets of students—by language, educational or socio-economic background—with similar learning needs such that bilingual aides or additional pronunciation, for example, could be provided without holding back the rest of the class.  

(WCA)

Older Chinese people being with younger people in class makes it even worse because it shows they are useless and they lose face when they open their mouth to speak English.  

(WCA)

Young people are more interested in programs such as Circuit Breaker, they don’t like being with older students.  

(P)

‘Confidence is tricky’

Many Europeans can argue that after 50 they are too old to go to class.  

(WCA)

In fact, respondents across the country frequently remarked on shyness and lack of confidence as an impediment to registration and enrolment. This is particularly true of refugees who have been forced to leave their home environments, unlike family reunion immigrants who may be expected to have a supportive network, and business migrants who by definition tend to be entrepreneurial and outgoing. Perhaps the most extreme case cited in consultations was a view amongst the adult children of elderly Chinese that their parents would need to learn some English
before attending the AMEP in order to avoid embarrassment, even though it was explained that the AMEP caters for zero proficiency.

This lack of confidence can also be related, not just to objective concerns about learning another language, but to subjective sensitivities in sharing a learning environment with compatriots with whom one has little in common socially:

*It is important to recognise ‘social distinction’ in order to avoid the embarrassment of having compatriots of very different social status in the same class, satisfying neither.*

The same applies to sex, and age differences. Providers may well object that in practical terms they cannot cater for such distinctions or, in principle, that such distinctions and attitudes should not exist or be encouraged in egalitarian Australia. However, to the extent that providers are able and willing to deal with these distinctions, the authors were assured that reach was likely to improve.

The difficulties of addressing the widely differing needs of clients was identified by a welfare agency which argued harder than most against welfare dependency:

*There needs to be a balance struck as in caseworking between responsiveness to clients’ individual needs and recognising what they can do for themselves. This can be achieved in part by negotiation with them as to course expectations.*

Given the difficulties faced by students in the first few years of settlement, it is hardly surprising that confidence and motivation levels may be low, and not just among the older or unskilled:

*For young people, motivation levels are crucial, and is [sic] often a reflection of age, confidence, and degree of family support. When they first come they are very highly motivated, after six months, motivation level is very low because their progress is slow, and they begin to think it is impossible to learn, yet they realise English is the key for Uni and TAFE. Often the family has very high expectations of them. Providers need to take into account the students’ background (e.g. refugees are often very quiet and then drop out). They really need to have support and awareness from teachers.*

As the comment above indicates, students will often drop out rather than seek to negotiate issues such as course expectations, methodologies and outcomes. It is well recognised that some cultures expect the teacher to have the answers as to what students need to know, and to get on with teaching without expecting students to debate possible teaching methods. Precisely those students with least confidence are likely to be talked down by their peers. A group of current and past AMEP clients expressed a
number of concerns about teaching styles, the lack of discipline, rigour and follow up with homework in courses, for example:

Students are allowed to come in late, go out to get a snack, homework is not followed up. It can get very frustrating for people who are desperate to make a new life, and they leave because they feel they are wasting their time.

Discussing these issues with teachers was not considered an option by this group, yet it was evident that their dissatisfaction with the AMEP had been clearly communicated to other potential AMEP clients and community workers.

Community organisations recognised they had a role in encouraging potential clients, particularly family reunion categories, to access the AMEP, and many saw the Home Tutor Scheme, or the conversation classes offered by some of them, as a way of building students’ confidence.

**Recommendation**

11 That providers consult with community organisations, which are representative of key under-reached communities, concerning their potential interest in more flexible delivery of AMEP, including:

- specific targeted courses (eg ‘the Australian workplace’, ‘Employment for new arrivals’);
- courses specifically for women/mothers/carers of young children;
- less intensive courses;
- courses at non-standard hours, notably between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm;
- alternative venues, particularly in any locations the communities themselves may wish to nominate/make available;
- on-going consultative arrangements.

**Bilingual teachers and teacher aides**

It shows they are useless and they lose face when they open their mouth to speak English. They need bilingual classes.  

(WCA)

Both providers and community groups report a range of reactions to efforts with bilingual tuition. Leaving aside pedagogical issues, from the providers’ viewpoint there are obviously major difficulties of demand and supply: they have to have a viable number of students of the same language background who want assistance in their own language and they have to have available trained teachers or suitable teacher aides with an adequate language background. The demand side of this equation does not usually justify the effort to identify a teacher who has a command of a language other than English.
Nor is it enough to have sufficient students of the same language background to justify separate provision for them. Many advanced learners, for example, find bilingual assistance unnecessary, even condescending. Attitudes are also cultural in part. The range of conflicting views expressed in consultations is worth recording as they relate to different groups:

A bilingual worker was provided for a group of Somali women who even then did not stay in numbers.

Some Vietnamese, notably those from rural areas and from the north have no contact with Western culture; they need bilingual teachers or teacher assistants for, say, the first six months, otherwise they are likely to drop out after a few weeks and the word gets around that AMEP is not for them.

Bilingual teacher assistants have been tried and were very popular; particularly for students who experience literacy problems; however this was not the case for students from El Salvador and Vietnam.

Several community groups reported that many Chinese people are used to bilingual teachers and feel very frustrated to 'stay at school for a whole day, but nothing can be understood. They think it is a waste of time.' Others, however, who want to learn fast, realise they need to practise, and enrol elsewhere.

One provider's perceptive comment is relevant to many of the issues addressed in this study, and not simply the use of bilingual teaching staff:

Client perceptions often reflect the way in which support is offered. Bilingual workers [at a specific venue] were highly regarded by clients and other service providers.

In other words, students may not ask for a service they think will not be made available, but where it is an option demand may justify its provision. Bilingual teaching was considered by several community organisations to be particularly appropriate to groups of older learners, who felt embarrassed in mixed-level classes or classes with younger, quicker learners. Similarly, it was considered beneficial for absolute beginners, illiterate learners or those with little formal educational background, and those women from communities who are accustomed to engaging in activities as part of a group from their own language background.

As most of these learners are currently under-represented in the AMEP, a more proactive bilingual strategy may be appropriate. Aspects of such a strategy would include:

- identifying the principal, untapped reach groups by language background:
• identifying the language backgrounds of the existing teaching force employed by the provider;

• tentative decisions on remuneration appropriate to potential teacher aides or other categories of assistant, taking into account cross-cultural dimensions such as status and related issues;

• discussion with community groups, where appropriate, of the availability of people within target communities who might be available to provide assistance in the classroom;

• possibly advertisement in ethnic media for teacher assistants, with clear identification of responsibilities and any qualifications required, both formal and informal and in terms of language.

It is only common sense that employers within the AMEP should know the language backgrounds of their teachers (and other staff). However, recruitment of teachers or teacher aides from a specific background is a delicate issue, particularly in terms of the possible political, religious or other social tensions between specially recruited teachers and students, unless the community is adequately consulted. It is for this reason that public advertisement is not a first choice, except in the case of an influx of potential students from a completely ‘new’ language background. On the other hand, all of the ramifications of even an ‘informal’ approach to any community need to be thought through, as failure to follow up, or rejection of the community’s preferred ‘assistant’ on grounds not appreciated by the community, is likely to prove counter-productive.

One of the most successful examples of the use of bilingual teachers came from a joint venture between a provider and a local Chinese association using very highly qualified teachers who spoke both Mandarin and Cantonese. It is significant that the Chinese students attended classes for only six hours a week. A compromise was made with the association in that the provider included some non-AMEP students (with DIMA approval), and in return received free accommodation in the association’s premises and publicity in Chinese in the ethnic media. This appears a very worthwhile initiative. It shows the value of close involvement with major community organisations, and their commitment to supporting community members who want to learn or improve their English as long as the provider is seen as being ‘serious’.

Earlier in this report, the authors identified the value of providers and communities sharing experiences and views on priorities on a regular basis. The availability, terms of employment, usefulness and acceptability of bilingual teachers and teacher aides in increasing the reach of the AMEP to certain communities is a case in point, illustrating the importance of input from communities.

**Recommendation**

12 That providers consult representatives of their key communities about the appropriateness of developing strategies for greater use of bilingual teachers or teacher aides.
Alternative delivery methodologies

Delivery methodologies such as distance learning and home tutoring provide alternatives or useful adjuncts to face-to-face teaching, as do computer-assisted learning methodologies whether they are centre-based or home-based. Some or all of these options might provide some of the flexibility that potential clients are said to need.

Distance learning

Distance learning is a highly appropriate mode for clients in rural and remote areas, or for those precluded from attending courses due to family or work responsibilities. Consultations indicate that the uptake of distance learning varies markedly across Australia. Two of the largest States report metropolitan residents as the main users whereas another reports that distance learning is mainly taken up in non-metropolitan areas.

Uptake of distance learning in one of the largest States was more than double the predicted demand, with distance modes being used to complement less intensive face-to-face tuition. The ability to meet demand depends on resources available, and creative strategies to accommodate need. For example, students in some instances may be enrolled in both a TAFE college and a community college for two days a week each, or may access a part-time course as well as the distance-learning mode.

In another State, a sizeable proportion of some communities (between a third and over half in two instances) did not pursue their initial commitment to distance learning, with a total of 19 out of 41 participants either not starting or withdrawing. This involves costs in books and other materials and makes staff planning at least as difficult as for face-to-face teaching.

While distance learning increases reach for some students, it operates at the margins of current delivery modes. There can be limitations in addressing needs—such as literacy or oral communication, particularly pronunciation—through this mode of learning. However, it appears that some students who anticipate proceeding to higher education find distance learning a preferable mode, possibly because of the appropriateness of home study. Similarly, many shift or casual workers, and parents of young children, find this mode of learning viable, especially if reinforced by enrolment in a community class or sessions with home tutors.

As one provider observed, with the number of distance students emailing teachers, there are clear indications that the potential for distance learning could be further exploited if the materials presently used nationally It’s Over to You, (NCELTR 1996) were adapted and enhanced for on-line delivery. The authors are aware that a report has been produced for DIMA (Corbel and Menagé 2000) which examines related issues and is deserving of consideration by DIMA to identify the potential for enhancing reach.

Perhaps it is because most non-provider respondents do not have a primary focus on ESL, that many revealed little knowledge of local
distance-learning options. This lack of awareness seemed exacerbated by the new delivery arrangements where one provider may be responsible for distance learning for a whole State but have little ongoing contact with community organisations in regions where it no longer operates.

**Recommendation**

13 That DIMA in its consultations with community organisations seek their views on the priority to be attached to the promotion of distance learning whether in ‘stand alone’ mode, interactive use on-line, or as a supplement to less intensive forms of tuition.

**Home tutors**

Nationally, home tutors are regarded as a highly appropriate delivery mode for women with children, young mothers, and for the elderly—in short for those who have difficulty in getting to classes, or lack confidence about their ability as students.

In a number of States, the Home Tutor Scheme was seen as a valuable supplement to AMEP classes, or distance learning arrangements, with clients being described as ‘greedy’ for it. However, several respondents remarked that home tutoring was desirable only until students could achieve sufficient confidence to attend classes and manage their other commitments in such a way as to attend, as the following comments demonstrate:

*Those keen to get on want teaching and conversation in classes.*

(P)

*One hour a week is not enough to learn English and after two years people can understand only their own tutor.*

(WCA)

*The home tutor scheme is not very highly regarded once some progress is made as it gives little opportunity to practise and to speak to other people.*

(WCA)

In the case of torture and trauma victims, some argue that they require the confidence-building which home tutors may provide. However, one respondent remarked that they are:

*...generally quite happy with the 100 hour induction to AMEP through community centre classes and delivery in the familiar environment of the MRC.*

(WCA)

Some community agencies and client groups seemed unclear about what the Home Tutor Scheme involves and its potential. For example, one
agency was under the misconception that the term referred to conversation assistance in the classroom, whereas another community group believed that home tutors could assist students with shopping and banking.

A number of providers observed that it is difficult to recruit home tutors as they are often not available in the areas of greatest need; that is areas of high immigrant density, such as the Western suburbs of Melbourne and South Western suburbs of Sydney, where there are relatively few native speakers available. Volunteers are understandably reluctant to travel. Indeed, with many if not all tutors being trained conversation tutors who have undertaken an accredited tutor training course, costs to volunteers are not inconsiderable. The authors note that at least one Migrant Resource Centre provides an honorarium to cover their volunteers’ petrol costs for 'lesson preparation and curriculum development'.

It was suggested that payment for AMEP home tutors may offer greater possibilities of responding to demands where these exceed supply—which is not the case in all areas. However, it would be inequitable and possibly counter-productive to devise a scheme which rewarded only those tutors who came forward in response to demand, leaving long-standing or experienced tutors disadvantaged where supply exceeded demand.

**Recommendation**

14 That DIMA consider allowing providers to reimburse home tutors' travel costs up to an agreed limit.

**Flexibility: Some innovative options**

While there was general consensus among respondents on the value of carefully focused courses and modes of learning, many providers pointed out the logistical challenges in forming homogeneous classes, or classes for specific groups of learners:

> We find it difficult with young people. We could offer a class if there were enough of them, but the critical mass is just not there at the right time, so we refer them elsewhere, to TAFE or Intensive Language Centres at schools.

Many of the approaches providers reported were well received, in fact, appeared to focus on 'fast stream', highly motivated learners:

> In addition to the standard 20 hours, students can undertake six hours of electives each week at no extra cost (eg IELTS, Study Skills, Computing, Marketing, Accounting—the latter two receiving credit towards the Associate Diploma).

> We find we have a demand for a wide range of courses—work and age focused, distance learning. At Level 3, some of our
courses are content driven (e.g., modules in essay writing, pronunciation, speaking skills, English for Further Study and English for professionals).

In another instance, students who were most inclined to enrol in intensive courses were explicitly identified as being those whom it is easiest to reach, since they did not have family responsibilities:

‘Holiday classes, over December-January are most popular with recent arrivals, provided they are in the 50% who do not have children.

(P)

In Sydney, a small number of workplace-based courses for new arrivals were being successfully offered both under the AMEP and by community providers. One example was a course conducted for women working for small garment manufacturers, another involved a combination of funding under both the WELL (Workplace English Language and Literacy) program and the AMEP to provide courses in an aged care organisation. However, as providers pointed out, the setting up of such courses was often resource intensive.

The problem areas seem to concern the needs and priorities of less confident learners:

*English has to be pitched at an appropriate level instead of catering to a notional average. Functional English classes built around activities (e.g., sewing, cooking, shopping) are attractive to some women, particularly those from illiterate backgrounds for whom the Australian teaching culture is inappropriate. Classes in neighbourhood houses, not funded under the AMEP, had proved attractive to many students.*

(WCA)

However, the authors note that classes dealing with routine domestic activities (see above) were specifically identified by some male respondents as being childish and off-putting.

Another stratagem, used by a number of providers particularly for new arrivals, emphasised excursions and field trips which explain, for instance, how public transport and public libraries operate. Visits to the library were reported as being popular as it introduced students to the possibility of reading various papers in their first language and provided a toy library for children.

The relationship between providers and local MRCs and community organisations varied both from place to place and over time, and has important implications for the reach of the AMEP. It is impossible to generalise given the diversity of classes offered by some MRCs and community
organisations, the varying proportions of students who have exhausted their AMEP entitlement or whose time has expired, and the quite cooperative relations enjoyed in some areas where cross-referral seemingly occurs as a matter of course. However, the availability of a range of ESL classes from MRCs and community organisations is in direct competition with the AMEP—if not in principle, certainly in so far as potential clients find a highly informal approach attractive. While this may be beneficial as an introductory mechanism for those with no language learning experience, it may prove a barrier to transition along the pathway to formal teaching and progress in acquisition of functional English.

A key distinction between some community offerings and the AMEP is the extreme ‘flexibility’ of the former, to the extent that attendance is completely voluntary on a virtual ‘drop-in’ basis, more ‘practical’ course content is offered, and there is a de-emphasis on testing/assessment. This is said to be welcomed by ‘hard-to-reach’ students, particularly the elderly, who arrive under family reunion provisions and find AMEP too formal and ‘academic’. One MRC took the view that the elderly in particular need less assessment and more flexibility than is possible under AMEP/CSWE (Certificate in Spoken and Written English) requirements. For the same reasons, a large NSW provider used the Victorian Certificate in General Education in preference to the CSWE because of its greater perceived flexibility.

Feedback indicates that the requirement that students be tested in all four macroskills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) may well deter those who, rightly or wrongly, believe that they only need to be able to communicate orally, be able to read, and will have little use for report writing and other writing skills. This concern relates to two factors: a frequently expressed view that students’ own view of their needs were not being targeted and catered for, and an inherent contradiction in a privatised (ie ‘commercial’) government service which is constrained in the extent to which it supplies what its clients demand. As one community worker asked: ‘Who benefits from testing Granny?’

Clearly it is impossible to measure the extent of any negative impact of reach arising from the role of CSWE in the AMEP. The second study in this volume study, on the AMEP’s retention of students, may cast some light on CSWE’s likely impact on reach.

Be that as it may, DIMA may wish to consider whether those who are not currently reached at all are precisely those who lack confidence, see themselves as poor language learners and would be most readily deterred by an expectation that any formal teaching is associated with testing and the likelihood of failure. This deterrent may explain the attractiveness of other ‘non-threatening’ delivery modes, such as conversation classes, whether or not related to activities like cooking, knitting and childbirth, and ‘social English’ for some elderly people. The understandable emphasis on ensuring government funding of the AMEP produces worthwhile outcomes may need to be critically re-examined for those who do not take up their entitlement and have no ‘outcome’ whatsoever.
Recommendations

15 That DIMA consult providers about the desirability of its funding the development of resources nationally which would cater to the interests of special groups (eg ‘English for Childbirth’, ‘The Australian workplace’, and illiterate students who do not speak English).

16 That DIMA conduct a review of the impact of assessment on the reach patterns of those students who may be most threatened by the association of schooling with testing and failure and, if necessary, review alternatives to assessment as a means of measuring AMEP outcomes in the case of such students.

Other delivery-related aspects of reach

In addition to flexibility, respondents identified three other issues related to delivery, which they believed could impact on the AMEP’s reach. These were:

• the inadequacy of the time available to learners;
• the absence of any compulsion to register and complete one’s entitlement;
• the transition to commercial delivery arrangements.

All of these issues relate in one way or another to sensitive policy decisions which tend to impact to a greater or lesser extent on funding, in so far as they identify a need for more tuition or different delivery arrangements.

You can have functional English or 510 hours: which(ever) comes first?

If people do not access their entitlement because of economic or family pressures, why shouldn’t they be able to access it later? (WCA)

ASLPR 2 is not functional, but merely survival English. (P)

It will not surprise anyone connected with the AMEP that issues related to 510 hours of tuition were mentioned in many contexts during discussions connected with this study. Some providers were strongly of the view that achievement of ASLPR 2 did not constitute functional English.

Community groups perceived an emphasis on ‘pushing students through their 510 hours as quickly as possible’ and argued that a significant proportion of the 510 hours was lost in the early months because of the students’ need to address other settlement issues and the priority accorded to finding a job, even an hourly job, in order to maintain independence and self-esteem. A sizeable number of students from the Horn of Africa, for example, were said to complete their 510 hours without being able to spell their name. They had not achieved functional English and needed to be
directed to numeracy and literacy courses. As one respondent put it 'motivation is everything in language learning', and those who do not register are those who lack motivation and an expectation of success.

A number of Migrant Resource Centres, perhaps most, as well as community centres, provide English classes which tend to cater for a wide variety of categories:

- older people who never used the AMEP and no longer have an entitlement;
- some who did not take up their 510 hours because of family commitments;
- those assessed at the offshore migration post as having already acquired 'functional English', but who find their English is not good enough to secure employment;
- other ineligible categories, such as tertiary students.

It would appear that some of these students have completed their 510 hours but have not yet achieved functional English. Apart from students and any others who may not intend to settle in Australia, all the above categories would benefit from greater flexibility in the 510 hours requirements and restrictions. Complementary ESL is certainly desirable after completion of 510 hours, particularly conversation and social English for jobseekers.

Many providers, too, urged that DIMA should extend the eligibility period and the entitlement beyond 510 hours. This may be seen by the cynical as self-interest; however, it is widely argued that the current limits, while defensible to ensure the AMEP is identifiable as a 'settlement' program, discriminate markedly against women with children.

For others, as earlier discussion has shown, the time limit means that the AMEP's reach almost always loses out to any employment opportunity or to any perception that employment would be jeopardised by committing to continued AMEP attendance. A frequent concern expressed in consultations centred around the large number of people who have never accessed the AMEP and were now keen to do so because of retrenchment at work or release from family responsibility:

There are many long term residents in our area who have never accessed the AMEP because they've been here for years, or are in the wrong category. Yet we know many of them are keen to learn. What is the government doing about this large pool of ineligible people?

When I come here, someone should tell me to go straight away to learn English, but not enough money, I have to work, now children grow up, and no more work, I can learn, but too late for proper class.

(Turkish conversation class)
Settlement may be regarded by some as a linear, logical process, but such a simplistic view fails to take into account the logic of the very real and urgent priorities facing new settlers. It seems contradictory that residents who have seized every opportunity to support themselves and their families should, after no more than a year, be deemed to no longer qualify for or need formal AMEP tuition by virtue merely of the passage of time.

Moreover, given that an intensive course could lead to students completing their 510 hours in one year, it is unclear why they must start tuition within one year and complete tuition within three years when they could start tuition within two years and still complete it within three years. Without endorsing the three year limit, at the very least it would create more flexibility, make for a simpler message and put less pressure on students if they knew they could enrol and complete tuition at any time within three years. In fact, immigrants who wish to take up a 510 hour entitlement at any time are acknowledging:

- their desire for settlement;
- the importance they now attribute to the acquisition of English;
- their new-found capacity to focus on the acquisition of English.

These motivated students are likely to make greater progress faster (ie produce better AMEP outcomes) than if they are obliged to enrol within the current time limits, when they realise that they are unable to give the time and attention to study which language learning demands.

Another suggestion, from two different community groups, was that some of the AMEP funds could be re-allocated to cater better for under-represented categories, such as women with young children, to enable them to access English tuition sooner rather than later. As they suggested these students’ entitlements to up to 510 hours in the scheduled classes could be used to enable clients to access tuition hours which may prove more expensive because of higher home tutor or childcare costs. These respondents pointed out that this would be greatly beneficial to the clients and their families, who at present are often unable to learn any English at all. If, following consideration of this report, DIMA does not support an extension of the eligibility period, it should consider an alternative funding strategy consistent with a maximum entitlement of 510 hours for those students who conclude that they will not be able to access their entitlements under standard arrangements.

An allocation of funding equivalent to 510 hours could be made available to allow clients to nominate for home teaching (rather than simply tutoring) for a reduced period (less than 510 hours). A funding formula would take into account the higher costs of catering to a single client but would allow and encourage such clients to share ‘costs’ with other students—whether they are of the same language and/or cultural background or simply located in the same neighbourhood—who are also unable to attend mainstream classes.

This ‘reduced hours/higher cost per hour’ strategy would cater for, but not be restricted to: potential clients who are responsible for caring for children, elderly clients, illiterate students, and those who lack sufficient confidence to
attend standard classes. In the interests of flexible delivery, students should be able to access standard classes for the remainder of their entitlement if their circumstances change and they wish to do so. The disadvantage of this approach is that it would reduce the incentive for providers to offer classes in a range of locations close to their clients, and would adversely affect the critical mass available to make such classes economically viable for providers.

The authors understand that DIMA is unable to change the requirement that the 510 hour entitlement be completed within three years as it is enshrined in current legislation, and extension to five years is readily available on application. However, given this study’s highlighting of impediments to reach, equity considerations, and the significant competing demands facing potential clients, it is evident that many respondents regard the time limit as a significant impediment. In so far as many potential clients may not be aware of the possibility of an extension to five years, both DIMA and providers are strongly urged to highlight this option in all future publicity for the AMEP.

**Compulsion**

Compulsion is the antithesis of flexibility. However, arguments for some form of compulsion were advanced by a surprising number of welfare agencies and clients, without the nature of the penalty for non-attendance ever being identified. They expressed concern at the long-term, ill effects of potential clients giving priority to employment over acquisition of English and failing to recognise their need for English for broader settlement purposes. Compulsion is also supported by some providers (who would benefit from increased attendance).

It needs to be acknowledged from the outset that compulsion in any form would be a major step. However, there are precedents where certain activities are considered so basic to the well-being of society, such as voting or the education of children, that they are deemed compulsory. In the case of education of children, however, the State can be said to be acting to protect children from those parents who do not see the need for basic education. It is another thing to impose ‘adult education’ on adults who are in employment, although the current popularity of the concept of ‘mutual obligation’ in the granting of income support seems to support the notion of compulsion.

The arguments put forward by respondents in favour of compulsion covered a number of issues. It was pointed out that Centrelink ‘has clout’ and correspondence from it would be read, or friends would be found to read it, whereas the AMEP does not (the low response rate to providers’ correspondence bears this out). The same respondent remarked that while some agencies argued that home visits were required to explain and popularise the AMEP, Centrelink did not make home visits. Correspondence from children’s schools, it was suggested by another welfare agency, receives more attention than that from AMEP providers which, if in English, ‘go straight into the bin’. In this context one provider’s experience is pertinent: this provider found that when DIMA was mentioned in the context of the
need to register (but with no hint of compulsion), there was an unexpectedly good response in terms of registration. The authors understand that, since DIMA requested that the letter be reworded and any perceived ambiguity removed, there has been a significant reduction in potential clients’ responsiveness to the letter.

It was also argued that Ethnic Communities Councils and other organisations could be encouraged to put pressure on their communities and to raise expectations about AMEP participation, particularly if some form of compulsion were to be introduced, or even mooted: ‘Everything should not be left to government’ nor should AMEP attendance and improved reach be seen exclusively as a government responsibility.

However, there are several persuasive arguments against compulsion in its simplest form. The strongest of these gives real weight to the need for flexibility if any form of compulsion were to be introduced, pointing out it would be inhuman to penalise men or women who find work in the early stages of settlement. The authors can think of no other part of the population which is required to undertake education or training at the expense of employment. Extending the period within which the 510 hours must be completed would make compulsion more feasible and lessen the risk of such an inequity.

Moreover, it is difficult to identify a satisfactory penalty for non-attendance, short of deprivation of income support. As one community group said of the proposal: ‘it is unworkable’. Another pointed out that the number of people not attending would remain the same even under a compulsory system because non-attendance had more to do with their need of income than any lack of interest in learning English. Those penalised for non-enrolment could argue that there is a contradiction between the requirement that social security payments depend on looking for work—which most desperately want—while students need to improve their English/attend classes:

Almost everyone would attend classes if they could afford to forgo income.

Although there was a suggestion that a refundable deposit be paid before the award of a visa—together with a signed commitment to take up the entitlement within some stated period—it was also recognised that this would severely penalise people for whom immigration already involves major costs.

There were a number of suggestions that encouragement rather than compulsion should be favoured. One group of refugees, for example, pointed out that financial incentives were offered in refugee camps for learning English, and this led to increased enrolments.

The most innovative proposal argued that completion of the 510 hours, as evidence of commitment to successful settlement in Australia, could be used to warrant bonus points for family reunion, which is a clear priority
for many potential clients. While the authors see some merit in this suggestion, it disregards the objective difficulties that interfere with their consistent attendance which many potential clients encounter and would disadvantage them unjustly. It would also raise implementation issues:

- Would attainment of ‘functional English’ satisfy the ‘completion’ requirement?
- Would this not place pressure on teachers and providers to lower the standard?
- What other evidence of ‘completion’ would be required?
- Would distance learning qualify and how would it be monitored, if the sole requirement is completion of 510 hours, not ‘functional English’?
- Would some students continue to ‘attend’ classes while finding learning beyond them for one reason or another, resulting in an unfavourable learning environment for other students?
- Would this not place an undue burden on teachers?

Another suggestion was that all successful visa applicants with an AMEP entitlement be awarded a voucher or token for 510 hours tuition. Provided it were handled in a culturally sensitive way (eg did not have gambling overtones for communities which consider gambling improper), this could highlight each individual’s entitlement, not just that of the principal visa applicant. If a voucher were to be attractively designed, in the potential student’s own language, and, like the interpreter card indicated to providers’ reception staff that the person was of a given language background and sought to register for the AMEP, it could:

- welcome a new student to his or her AMEP entitlement;
- overcome bureaucratic niceties of language about limitations on the entitlement;
- provoke interest and an expectation of follow-up on arrival;
- be perceived as a ‘free good’ or one already partly paid for in the case of some visa categories, which could be lost if not taken up;
- identify the contact details of the provider(s) at the point of entry;
- minimise diffidence about the language barrier on arrival at the AMEP;
- lead to contact being made between more potential students and providers, who would then be able to spell out the options and identify ‘class sizes’ of students with special needs or preferences.

A specific area in which compulsion was argued for by two providers concerned potential clients admitted on ‘spouse’ visas, where their partner is an Australian resident (in practice most entering on this visa are women). In a significant number of cases people in this visa category do not register and providers and welfare agencies recognise that many spouses are prevented or discouraged from accessing their AMEP entitlement, where they are aware of it.
Recommendation

17 That, as part of a promotional strategy, DIMA commission a trial of vouchers advising potential clients of their possible entitlements. The strategy should, in consultation with providers and relevant community groups:

- identify a source country (or a limited number of source countries from different language and cultural groups) with projected significant future immigrant numbers and currently of low reach;
- design, and distribute at entry points, the vouchers in the recipients’ language, providing contact details of provider(s);
- monitor and review the effectiveness of the strategy.

Transition to commercial delivery arrangements

The tendering out of the AMEP in 1997–8 was the subject of much comment in New South Wales. A number of agencies and community groups were critical of the shift to competitive commercial arrangements in AMEP delivery. Indeed, one new provider perceived not being regarded as a government service as a disadvantage.

This study has identified potential clients’ uncertainty about the value of attempting to learn English if class attendance jeopardises immediate employment or availability for casual work. Any perception that providers are only interested in recruiting ‘numbers’, as banks once sought ‘accounts’, needs to be nipped in the bud by appropriate consultation, explanation and publicity. Failure to do so could result in image problems for the AMEP and increased difficulties in meeting providers’ ‘break even’ class sizes, with a resultant incapacity to provide the range of flexible options this study identifies as being desirable to increase reach.

Criticisms from community agencies following the tendering process concerned the resulting confusion in the community and a rationalisation and reduction in services, such as counselling, during transition arrangements, and a perceived loss of networks which had been built over many years. Some community workers admitted their reluctance to refer clients to the new agencies, until they had established a track record in providing culturally sensitive services to refugees and trauma victims.

Some comments about a decline in services seemed to be more a result of perception and assumption, rather than fact or experience:

When it was all the one system, students could move between centres and records were computer linked, now it is more difficult.

(WCA)

Providers pointed out that student records are, in fact, linked. A number of community workers also seemed unaware of the types of courses on offer, particularly more flexible forms of provision, such as weekend courses. Many
students were said to have ‘fallen between the cracks’, with rumours spreading among particular communities that they no longer had any entitlements to English tuition. DIMA attributes much of this confusion to an active campaign by the NSW Teachers Federation against the new arrangements. Given the importance of ‘word of mouth’ and community agency referrals, it is important for DIMA and new providers to continue to address such concerns, and dispel any erroneous assumptions made. Closer ongoing monitoring by DIMA officers was recommended by one MRC as a way of dealing with issues of concern before they became major problems.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, a number of community agencies, even in New South Wales, saw distinct advantages in the new arrangements, with more flexible, responsive provision resulting, as these comments demonstrate:

_In this region, the shopfront for the AMEP stayed the same, so the transition did not cause a great deal of difficulties and there’s been quite a few changes for the better._

(WCA)

_For us, there are more centres now available than before, and at different times, so more people are able to get access. Migrants are more concerned with the quality of provision rather than who actually does it, and this does not seem to have suffered._

(WCA)

_They’ve really worked hard, and it is just now beginning to pay off._

(WCA)

**Recommendation**

18 That, in the next tendering round consultation with providers, DIMA give greater emphasis to a communication/publicity strategy directed to community groups and welfare agencies to address concerns about any changes to delivery arrangements, and promote the benefits of greater flexibility in provision.

**Lesser delivery-related issues**

Apart from the major issues listed at the beginning of this chapter, which were raised time and again in discussion during interviews, respondents mentioned a range of other concerns about program delivery. Some may have been raised by very few respondents, while others reflect program requirements or contractual constraints which cannot be readily addressed in the absence of significant policy changes by DIMA. Nonetheless, they are listed below, as they provide food for thought and for further consultation by providers with local communities:

_Breaks in terms are bad as they can affect childcare arrangements as well as learner motivation and acclimatisation to learning._

(WCA)
Many refugees, who are catered for in classes of seven and eight students in the Special Preparation Class, are later critical of the size and attention they receive in the normal class, which is inescapable given the costs structure.

Issues identified by one agency as reflecting a lack of flexibility by AMEP providers included:

Providers not realising and making good use of the availability of bilingual volunteers who recognised the importance of ESL and were keen to help their communities.

The constraints placed on providers under ‘restricted contracts’ in some areas which preclude their offering classes outside limited locations, or offering Home Tutor Scheme and distance learning options, thereby limiting flexibility and marketing considerably (eg the capacity to offer venues nearer to potential students, who are not able to travel or are unable to pay for transport, because of the need to save every cent for family reunions).

Home tutors not being provided to students who requested one, and prospective students not being prepared to insist or follow up why they have not heard any further about a home tutor.

A lack of access in country areas despite claims to the contrary (eg there being no home tutors in a major country centre).
Chapter 5

Needs of specific groups

The most obvious, most frequently cited needs of some groups, such as accessible, culturally appropriate childcare for mothers, have been dealt with under other headings. The topics discussed in this section were, in some instances, identified by only a few respondents. Even so these people draw on a wealth of experience of the needs of the community concerned, and providers may wish to respond to these in course offerings.

Women

Many of the needs of female AMEP clients have already been addressed in discussing childcare and transport needs, are not gender-specific, or are identical to the learning needs and difficulties of the other groups discussed in this section. However, three specific difficulties stand out.

Women married to Australian citizens

Women who are married to Australian men do not appear to get much opportunity to attend classes (P). Many spouses, such as Filipino women, have special problems:

One trying to get a deferral had missed out because her husband claimed not to know about the entitlement until too late.

Some husbands themselves have literacy and language problems. One provider urges that:

Publicity needs to present the case for ESL being in men’s interests; some men as they get older find that their spouses’ lack of English becomes irritating, as they cannot shop independently, understand medical needs of the old, industrial accidents, and other major problems.

The same provider argued that Australian males should be obliged to watch a video about the advantages of their wives learning English before a visa is issued to their spouses, and should then undertake a short quiz to show they had watched and taken in the key points.

Single mothers

Single mothers, where they are aware of the AMEP, may intend to enrol once the children reach school age. However, where they have several
children they can lose their entitlement because of the three-year limit. They may also be unaware of the availability of childcare. Single mothers are a significant part of refugee intakes from areas such as the Horn of Africa. They are unlikely to be able to access AMEP for a variety of reasons and yet are very motivated to learn English (WCA). Somali women would like an informal, slower-paced learning environment, for women only. Hospital classes related to childbirth and initial childcare are also successful in this respect.

Many women who accept the main carer’s role need to build their confidence and knowledge of the new environment and are more likely to attend AMEP classes if this is somehow built in and promoted, not just learning ESL.

(WCA)

Refugees

The vast majority of refugees are relatively well catered for when they arrive in a group and are met, provided with on-arrival accommodation and introduced into Special Preparatory classes and the AMEP in a very orderly way (P). However, some who come under family reunion arrangements may slip through the welcoming services net and only encounter AMEP haphazardly thereafter (P).

Confidence is a big issue for many torture and trauma victims. This, and their other concerns, mean that a substantial proportion cannot concentrate on ESL (WCA). Quite a number of providers, and some community groups, were adamant that torture and trauma victims still needed special attention upon integration into AMEP after completion of their Special Preparatory classes. Incapacity to sit in a group was one disability explicitly mentioned (P). It is suggested that some torture and trauma students would be better off attending classes for only one or two mornings a week, even after completion of their 100 hours of special preparation for AMEP, as trauma slows down the process of addressing settlement issues. One group in particular was critical of the lack of support provided:

Before coming here, we were told we’d get all this help, housing, English course, childcare, but now we find we have big problems which we have to solve ourselves. They are big problems, and English is only one of them. People worry more about house and job [sic].

Even four days a week as practised by some providers for AMEP students is too many for these students. This poses a problem for teachers and students alike, as absences are likely to result in torture and trauma students falling behind the class.

One respondent pointed out that a balance is needed between proper concern to meet the initial settlement needs of refugees and the longer term goal of ensuring their economic independence and self-reliance. This
balance is in their interest in ensuring their own self-esteem is bolstered and welfare dependence avoided and, thus, is in society’s interest. On the other hand, one provider was of the opinion that too much ‘hand-holding’ of people who have shown great strength and resilience before they get to Australia, can be counter-productive, and may result in some refugees feeling they are entitled to continuing support. Similarly, some refugee groups expressed the need for more focused, rigorous courses that recognised the urgency they felt in learning English, gaining suitable employment and reuniting with their families.

Another respondent, conscious that some refugees are reluctant to accept lower level employment, proposed that they be offered job placement after two to three weeks to familiarise them with Australian society (WCA). Similarly, a community group suggested a systematic work experience or traineeship arrangement linked to the AMEP. The authors feel that this would be a major undertaking, reflecting a policy initiative which would need to be addressed by relevant government departments (assuming that providers did not take it up individually). It would also raise questions of equity vis-à-vis other AMEP clients.

**Illiterate learners**

*Quite a number of illiterate arrivals are reluctant to access classes.*

(WCA)

Illiteracy is an issue identified more by welfare agency and community organisations than by providers; indeed one provider was explicit that illiteracy was not an issue. However, this may reflect one of the major ‘no show’ categories where registration is concerned.

One welfare agency argued that ‘people with literacy problems in their own language need a slower introduction to learning, and something like 12 hours over an initial six weeks’ and a different agency also remarked on the need for a gradual approach explicitly for Somali students, especially women. It was expected that ‘schooling’ should start with the alphabet.

Arguably, the illiterate students whom providers do see are most likely to be refugees whose numbers may be sufficient to facilitate tailored methods of teaching and who have been ‘inducted’ into formal language learning through Special Preparatory classes. This may tend to obscure the existence of other illiterate students who are not reached, because they are not refugees and lack the confidence to register for standard AMEP classes. Such groups include elderly clients from Chinese, Vietnamese, Turkish and Arabic backgrounds.

Conversely, providers and DIMA may need to assess whether insistence on acquisition of literacy by such students is worth the possible deterrent effect and non-registration/non-enrolment. The authors also encountered anecdotal but repeated observations that some such students failed to acquire even basic spoken English from the AMEP which seeks to spread

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teaching and learning across all four macroskills. One concerned welfare worker remarked of a fellow-countryman/woman from the Horn of Africa that after 510 hours s/he could barely get across to counter staff the name of the person she dealt with in the welfare agency. Here again the importance of the image of the AMEP communicated by word of mouth through networks of friends and families appears likely to suffer.

For students who fail to achieve even basic oral communicative competency in English, any compulsory emphasis on literacy in the limited time-frame available does them a disservice and must be extremely frustrating and demoralising for them. Alternative interpretations of students’ attitudes may simply beg the question: ‘For Africans [sic], literacy is the biggest problem, as it appears literacy is not highly valued in some societies and students need to be convinced to put effort into acquiring literacy skills [P]’. It may simply be that previously unschooled students want to devote their limited confidence to trying to learn to speak before they fail to learn to write.

Yet again, the successful efforts of some illiterate students, who have already acquired some degree of oral proficiency, can be no reliable guide to the attitudes of those who do not register. The impact of CSWE competency testing requirements on flexible teaching, although part of the orthodoxy of the current system, appears likely to have an unquantifiable impact on reach. There may be a case for providers together with DIMA examining:

- the adequacy of materials available for teaching illiterate students who speak no English;
- possible economies of scale if new materials are funded and developed for use nationally.

**Vietnamese clients**

*The Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodians find it harder to learn English: some have been directed to AMEP and have not wanted to go.*

(WCA)

The failure of many members of the Vietnamese community to register is quite marked. A large number of potential clients miss out on an important aspect of Australia’s settlement services and providers find their budget skewed significantly if this group fail to register, enrol and then attend classes.

At its simplest, there is a strong argument that English is harder to learn for people from a tonal language background, than it is for European language speakers and those of a non-tonal Asian language background. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, like other such agencies in English-speaking countries, allows considerably longer for its highly educated staff to learn tonal languages (and those with non-Western scripts). The fact that all Asian students, whether or not they have
completed secondary school or have had any education in their own country, are expected to learn English as rapidly as all other students would suggest that the AMEP expects them to make better students than part of the elite of Australian society. For Vietnamese speakers it is widely accepted that pronunciation is a major factor in the difficulties they experience in making the shift from a tonal language. As one community worker pointed out, Vietnamese learners can commonly become discouraged with their perceived slow progress after a few months, and quietly withdraw from the AMEP.

Pronunciation and communication difficulties more generally may also be assumed to impact on the perception that AMEP participation will not result in improved employment prospects. The obvious exceptions to these generalisations are those members of the Vietnamese (and Chinese) communities who come from a sophisticated educational background, are highly motivated and become very successful members of the Australian community.

Providers and members of the community itself remark that Vietnamese students frequently succeed in computing and related disciplines. Communication/pronunciation in these areas, while important, is arguably less central than it is in other employment.

Unfortunately, the CSWE approach, and the budgetary formula under which AMEP providers operate, makes no explicit provision for extended emphasis on pronunciation. Some providers, recognising this problem, have made special provision either through additional small groups or elective programs. They point out, however, that such provision ‘is expensive as you need almost one-to-one tutoring’.

In addition, the interview process associated with registration and enrolment is said to have very marked negative connotations for those members of the Vietnamese community from rural or lower socio-economic backgrounds who associate interviews by authorities with wrongdoing, and are also embarrassed about being asked their level of education. The authors were told this adversely impacted on reach even though, from the provider’s viewpoint, some form of placement interview is normally considered essential. The same sensitivities are likely to be experienced by other groups, particularly those who have suffered torture and trauma or have lived under authoritarian regimes.

Given concerns about low reach amongst the Vietnamese community, an alternative to the current approach to interviews may be worthwhile. Some of the questions individual providers ask may not be essential. For instance, where there are only AMEP streams targeted to two educational levels: ‘completed Year 10’ and ‘all others’, potential clients who have very little formal education might prefer to simply be able to indicate that they did not complete Year 10, without being asked for further details. Embarrassment about the involvement of providers’ staff and unfamiliar third parties could be overcome by making bilingual forms available which ask only essential questions, either for completion on the spot, or within the family where the client can access the literacy assistance/translation assistance he or she
feels most comfortable with (ie possibly a family member or friend rather than TIS (Translating and Interpreting Service), even if the resultant translation is imperfect). These forms could then be brought in to a brief, less threatening, placement interview. In conjunction with this registration form, bilingual reception staff should be employed at AMEP centres in areas where Vietnamese clients congregate (if they are not already) at widely publicised and appropriate times.

While use of forms might mean missing out on some of the counselling service that providers and other agencies may wish to make available, a client who has the confidence to register and enrol can access these services as required. A client who is deterred by the interview process from registering for the AMEP misses out on a major contribution to successful settlement. Similar sensitivity about intrusive interviews and minimal educational levels may be expected to influence some members of other communities’ preparedness to be reached.

An alternative perception of the Vietnamese community is that their size and concentration in particular locations means they do not need English to survive and do well—within their own community at least, but even beyond it by using interpreters. To counteract this perception, community workers advocated more publicity about the detrimental long-term effects on employment and family life:

_They need to be told why they should learn English for long-term future effects on work, settlement, how it can affect their children and lead to conflict when their parents have little English and little understanding of Australian culture._

Bilingual workers can be very influential in encouraging potential clients to take up their entitlements. For example, an on-site interpreter at one Centrelink office, where the Vietnamese community is relatively small and so employment within the community less likely, is thought to influence relatively high reach rates in that area.

Some Vietnamese feedback has suggested that AMEP delivery is too formal and that there is too much assessment. Concerns about inadequate tutoring in pronunciation difficulties have also been expressed.

There is also some concern that students with inadequate English are being accepted into vocational subjects and are unable to cope, and anecdotal statements about relying on other family members to complete assignments are expressed. Such students may not accept the need for ESL until their AMEP entitlement has lapsed.

**Chinese clients**

Confusion is said to contribute to failure to register in the case of the Chinese community because of their observation/misinterpretation of their compatriots’ behaviours:
• Chinese people from Hong Kong for the most part have no AMEP entitlement as they are professional or business people

• Some Chinese business people who pay offshore, do register and go back to China for 12 to 18 months before taking up classes

• Clients from China who had been granted permanent residence status in particular, it was said, may confuse their entitlements because so many ‘Chinese’ people fall into different visa categories.

The authors were told by a number of community members that more publicity is needed to clarify the position for those who misunderstand their entitlements (WCA).

It is claimed by one provider that the reason elderly Chinese are reluctant to register is because:

> their families can be supportive of them, but not of the AMEP and erect barriers; a mother or wife may say ESL is too hard and be frightened off, often they have to look after the grandchildren'.

However, in some locations providers find that there are sufficient numbers of elderly Chinese to enable them to ‘stream them off’ into special classes.

A number of community organisations and MRCs seemed able to successfully attract and retain Chinese clients, particularly the elderly and young women. As they pointed out, the format, location and intensity of these classes seemed to better meet their needs:

> Large classes with 20 people, all disparate levels, can be very frustrating for many people who prefer smaller groups, even if they are run by volunteers. The AMEP syllabus is too ‘academic’ for some who just want practical English. Many drop off after 100 hours and come to our conversation classes, often run by bilingual volunteers that provide more relevant settlement information (eg going to the doctor, shopping). They find the content is as important as the language tuition. Saturday classes are very popular, as are evening classes and those that fit in between school hours.

The size of the Chinese-speaking communities suggests that special efforts to clarify these issues would be justified in many locations.

**Filipino clients**

> Filipinos are something of a problem, like Indians they appear to feel both that their English is good enough and that AMEP is unlikely to improve their job prospects.

One welfare agency argues that in the case of the Filipino community, a pre-departure briefing or an orientation on arrival about the importance of
English is needed, as most Filipinos who have completed Year 12 believe they have good English, though this often proves not to be the case as they are not sufficiently fluent to function in Australia and find employment. The authors were advised that, despite undertaking their education in the Philippines in English, there is some evidence that Filipinos in some areas have the same unemployment rates as Vietnamese and Turks. If this is not the result of cultural factors (eg preference for ‘home duties’), or outright racism, it appears likely that language, and cross-cultural communication issues more generally, may play a significant role at job interviews and on the job.

The sensitivities of Filipinos and Indians educated through English are best addressed as part of general counselling about pathways.

**Indonesian clients**

The general understanding of providers is that many clients from Indonesia need to return to Indonesia because of family and business commitments. They tend to request two week courses and when these cannot be provided because there are insufficient numbers, they are unable to attend AMEP classes. Distance learning has been made available to a number of Indonesian clients but has not proved very successful, with a high ‘no show’ or drop-out rate imposing unproductive costs in making materials available.

School holidays, when potential students return to Australia to visit their school or university-age children, might present opportunities for registration and intensive courses. However, as long as Indonesian clients need to manage businesses in Indonesia, access to AMEP’s 510 hours at 15 or so hours a week is likely to prove unworkable.

Where there are significant numbers of Indonesian students, providers, in collaboration with DIMA, may wish to consider the most practical ways of conducting a survey of the numbers of potential Indonesian students available at any one time with a view to identifying workable AMEP delivery options.

**Teacher training in cross-cultural sensitivity**

*Most ESL teachers are sensitive to cross-cultural differences; some just think they are.*

(WCA)

Most comments made about ‘teaching’ had to do with institutional issues—such as the need for greater flexibility and separate classes for different categories of learning needs—which are outside the control of individual teachers. However, concerns were expressed about some teachers’ attitudes to students. This would appear to apply to only a minority of teachers, and some informants may be hypersensitive or be generalising from bad personal experiences. Nonetheless, word of mouth has been raised as a key element in publicity for the worth or otherwise of the AMEP.
‘All publicity is good publicity’ does not apply in the case of registration and enrolment for the AMEP. Providers need to be sensitive to clients’ concerns, and teacher attitudes were raised by enough respondents to make it clear that it may be adversely affecting reach.

The key concern was said to be some teachers’ attitudes to members of Lebanese and other Arabic-speaking communities, particularly stereotypical views of the role of the male and the subordination of women. The fact that the vast majority of ESL teachers are female had some bearing on negative perceptions of teachers’ attitudes. Fundamentally, members of the community were concerned that Australian attitudes to the family, family size and the desirability of a career for women outside the home resulted in negative perceptions of both Arabic males and those women who give priority to family responsibilities.

Australian concerns about domestic violence in the community at large, while proper, and shared by members of the Arabic community, can also be applied erroneously as, indeed they are within the Australian community itself. In an extreme case an Arabic woman with a limp was said to be understandably offended on being asked if her husband was assaulting her. These are grave issues. The concern of the community, however, is the appearance of stereotyping which was attributed to the teacher concerned.

Other criticisms related to perceived lack of sensitivity by some teachers of the stresses and anxieties experienced by refugees. A respondent remarked that to the extent that training in cross-cultural issues was available, teachers who exhibited prejudices were the very teachers who would not attend training sessions. Some had been teaching for a long time and believed they were sensitised.

Another agency argued for improved curriculum development and teacher training. This respondent stated that predominantly Anglo-Saxon teachers understandably have little understanding of the cultures and priorities of immigrants, particularly refugees and those who have most recently arrived. Teachers have been reluctant to learn what is required to enter the workforce, whereas this is a priority for their students.

Closer liaison between providers and communities was seen as an antidote to ignorance and prejudice. However, there is inadequate personal contact between providers’ staff and key figures in community organisations who would provide advice on their community’s priorities:

New arrivals are simply given information on classes and expected to attend what is made available: dropping off leaflets once in a while is not good enough.

Some cynicism was expressed about the level of commitment of teachers in what some now perceive as purely business activities. This commercial approach is culturally at variance with teachers’ high standing in some communities, best summed up in the Islamic saying that ‘the teacher is a messenger [of God]’.
The authors are aware that the initiatives of the AMEP Research Centre in 2000 included the design of professional development short courses and research-based activities for AMEP staff, as well as the establishment of an annual, national conference to showcase research activity within the AMEP. The annual conference provides a forum for teachers to present and discuss their work (Macquarie University Public Relations Unit 1999). These inter-related initiatives should help to meet the need for information exchange and collaboration among service providers and address any gaps in providers’ own professional development strategies for teachers.

**Recommendations**

19 That, in the interests of encouraging illiterate students to register and maintain enrolment, DIMA reconsider the importance attributed to English literacy for all as an outcome of the AMEP, allowing greater flexibility to providers to focus on clients’ own perceptions of their priorities amongst the four macroskills.

20 That providers, together with DIMA and members of the Vietnamese communities, consider the appropriateness of a simple bilingual national registration form to be made widely available by providers through Vietnamese and other bodies (eg childcare centres, grocers’ shops, surgeries etc), to be completed before any placement interview, with this strategy being evaluated and extended to other language groups if it proves effective.


DIMA 2000. Longitudinal survey of immigrants to Australia. Canberra: DIMA


National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research 1996. It’s over to you. Sydney: NCELTR


Tait, D, G Harrison and K Thomas 1990. Gateway to Australian Society: Migrant’s Experience of the AMEP, Wollongong: Adult Migrant English Program, University of Wollongong

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Organisations and individuals consulted
Appendix 2: Questionnaire for providers
Appendix 3: Tables
   Table 1 Offshore arrivals 1996–1999
   Table 2 Offshore reach by country of birth
Appendix 4: Summary of recommendations
Appendix 1

Organisations and individuals consulted

DIMA

Central Office
Julie Beattie, Director, AMEP
David Doherty, former Director, AMEP
Tess Gilfedder, Assistant Director, AMEP
Carol Hunt, former Assistant Director, AMEP (CLSB)
Trevor Magee, Manager, AMEP and Funded Programs
Annie Sturgess, Assistant Director, AMEP
Noel Swinden, Assistant Director, AMEP (CLSB)

Victorian office
David Ohlmus, Settlement Policy and Planning

Community groups, Migrant Resource Centres and other service agency representatives

Adelaide Migrant Resource Centre
Eugenia Tsoulis, Coordinator

Afghan Community Support Association, Blacktown
Taher Hessam, Community Worker
Nine Afghani refugees

Australian Asian Association Inc (WA)
Mel Fialho, President

Australian Chinese Community Association
Grace Zheng, Chinese Australian Services Society
Jennifer Lau, Echo Neighbourhood Centre
Lin Ye Kong, Chinese Migrant Welfare Association

Australian Lebanese Welfare Committee (Vic)
May Farah, Social Welfare Worker
Nirvana Saad, Social Welfare Worker

Belconnen Community Service Inc (ACT)
Thuy Tien Nguyen, Social Welfare Worker

Blacktown MRC (NSW)
Maria Vota, Coordinator
Rania Fahmi, Receptionist
Maggie Kempnney, Specialist Migrant Placement Officer

82 Increasing the reach of the Adult Migrant English Program
Senada Ljukovac, Humanitarian Entrants Worker
Roberto Malara, Community Project Officer
Donna Robertson, Administrative/Information Officer

**Canterbury Bankstown MRC (Campsie, NSW)**
Esta Paschalidis, Coordinator
Tarik Abdullah, Humanitarian Case Manager
Migual Ferrero, Administrative Worker, tenancy services
Thy Ai Ho, Vietnamese Case Worker
Veronica Millar, Community Projects Officer
Maggie Moa, Assistant Coordinator
Ali Rizk, Community Services Worker, Iraqui refugees

**Chinese Community Settlement Service Providers’ Network (NSW)**
May Chan, Community Worker, Asian Women at Work
Polly Chan, Cherrybrook Chinese Community Association
Kim Chung, Australian Chinese Community Association

**Ecumenical Migration Centre (Vic)**
Pamela Kosij, Social Welfare Worker
Theresa Sali, Social Welfare Worker

**Fairfield ESL Strategy Group, Fairfield ACL (NSW)**
Pam Franchi, Migrant Officer, Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
Brian Hartshorne, Granville TAFE
Caterina Mastroianni, ACL Educational Coordinator
Souzan Razmars, Community Settlement Services Worker, Fairfield
Multicultural Family Planning
Marika Stojanova, Multicultural Services Officer, Fairfield Centrelink

**Inner Western Region Migrant Resource Centre (Footscray, Vic)**
John Patsikatheodorou, Chief Executive Officer
Ulmaker Dalmar, Social Welfare Worker
Haileleul Gebre Selassie, Social Welfare Worker
Amina Maleken, Social Welfare Worker
Melba Marginson, Settlement Planner
Louise Spieler, Coordinator

**Islamic Women’s Council of Victoria**
Fatima Tawfik, Social Welfare Worker

**Logan and Beenleigh Migrant Resource Centre (Qld)**
Kelly Yip, Coordinator

**Migrant Resource Centre of the ACT**
Connor Bradley, Coordinator
Helen Malcomess, English Programmes Coordinator
Muslim Women’s Association (Lakemba, NSW)
Wafa Zaim, Coordinator
Eleven women from conversation class

North Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre (Preston, Vic)
Ian Lewis, Coordinator
Anne-Rose Reiner, Social Welfare Worker

Northern Suburbs Migrant Resource Centre (WA)
Malcolm Fialho, Executive Director

Ren Li Huang, Chinese Migrant Welfare Association
Kit Leung, Crows Nest Centre
Joseph Li, Chinese Parents Association, Children with Disabilities
Frances Tsang, Indo-China Chinese Association
Peter Wong, Community Service Worker,

South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre Inc (Dandenong, Vic)
Ahmed Zeed, Community Planning and Project Officer

Southern Tasmania MRC
Irene Matthews, Chief Executive
Le-Ella Doyle, Early intervention

St John of Kronstadt Russian Welfare Society (Vic)
Nick Schkola, Social Welfare Worker

Turkish Women’s Conversation Group, Blacktown MRC (NSW)
Rahile Cakir, MRC Case Worker
Seven Turkish women from conversation class

Victorian Co-operative on Children’s Services for Ethnic Groups
Gabrielle Fakhri, Vietnamese Workers Interagency (NSW)
Mai Dam, Elsie Women’s Refuge
Trang Dinh, Centacare
Anh Do, Centacare
Thuy Ai Ho, Canterbury Bankstown MRC
Hien Le, Vietnamese Women’s Association
Mai Luc, Centrelink, Campsie
Trang Mai, Department of Community Services
Ha Nguyen, Department of Education and Training, Fairfield district
My Le Nguyen, Family Care
Phi Nguyen, VAWA
Vinh Nguyen, Cabramatta Police
Celina Tong, Department of Education and Training, Granville district
Huong Tran, Vietnamese Chinese Association NSW
Nhu Tran, Lifeline, Western Sydney
Van B Trinh, Vietnamese Chinese Association NSW
Western Suburbs Lebanese Welfare Committee Inc (Vic)
Salah A. H. Abdo, JP, Social Welfare Worker
Dimitriou Avgoulis
Ali Kassab
Osman Taleb

AMEP providers

ACL Staff Bankstown (NSW)
Annie Brink, Educational Manager, Parramatta
Robyn Fiddick, ARMS Manager
Tabsu Gounder, Educational Manager, Fairfield
Michael Kessler, A/G Educational Manager, Rockdale
Ali Loria, Operational Manager
Judy Lumsden, Educational Manager, East Hills
Mary Ann McDonald, A/G Educational Manager, Cabramatta
Diana Santamare, Educational Manager, Bankstown
Carol Skafte-Zauss, Educational Manager, Auburn
Jennifer Whitmarsh, Educational Manager, Campsie

Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) (Vic)
Moira Schulze, Director
Bill Marks, Assistant Director
Michael Cox, Administrator, AMEP, A/g AMEP Program Manager
Pauline Davies, Centre Manager, Flagstaff
Kathy Gemes, Community Liaison Officer
Julie Anne Tolj, Venue Coordinator, Oakleigh

Brisbane Institute of TAFE Language and Literacy Services (Qld)
Ruth Gatehouse, Manager
Pam Moffatt
Gal Levy

Canberra Institute of Technology (ACT)
Jenny Osborne, AMEP Head of Department
Colleen Fox, AMEP Home Tutor Scheme
Chris Law, AMEP EPRS
Merran Martin, AMEP Home Tutor Scheme, TRANSACT
Judy O’Keeffe, AMEP EPRS
Bronwyn Rose, AMEP Distance Learning
Margie Sainsbury, AMEP Home Tutor Scheme
Doreen Wapshere, ESL Employment and Study

Central Metropolitan College of TAFE (WA)
Judith Parkin, AMEP Coordinator

Hilton International College (Qld)
Mrs Glynne Hilton, Director and Principal
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Vic)
Annette M. Willis, Manager, Language Programs

Independent Assessment Service (WA)
Mike Jones, AMEP Coordinator
Margaret Dory

Institute of Adult Education and Community Services (Tas)
Elizabeth Hodson, Team Leader

LM Training Specialists Pty Ltd (SA)
Lynn Oxland, Director

Northern Territory University
Lee Skichertly,
Dean, Faculty of Vocational Access and Remote Studies

St George Community College (Hurstville and Kogarah, NSW)
Ruth Fyfe, Manager AMEP
Olive Briscoe, Marketing Liaison Officer, AMEP

West Coast College of TAFE (AMES, WA)
Sandra Economou, Manager
Margaret Anderton, Distance Learning
Liz Bailey, Community Program Coordinator
Elyse Bougault, Special Preparatory Coordinator
Ellen Clair, Counsellor
Andrew Hillier, Centre-based Coordinator (Balga Centre)
Jackleen Toop, Data Manager
## Appendix 2

### Questionnaire for providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods used to attract clients to/facilitate access to AMEP</th>
<th>Yes ✓</th>
<th>No ✓</th>
<th>No use 1 ✓</th>
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<td>Information included as part of DIMA settlement service 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Included as part of information provided by other organisations relevant to immigrants’ needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letterbox drops in areas of high migrant concentrations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information leaflets made available at eg doctors’ surgeries, chemists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information leaflets translated into three relevant languages</td>
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<td>Information leaflets translated into more than three relevant languages</td>
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<td>Information leaflets containing partial information in relevant languages (eg how to access TIS)</td>
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<td>Advertisements in local ethnic print media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisements in local English media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advertisements in relevant languages on ethnic radio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approaches to relevant religious organisations/leaders</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Periodic meetings with relevant community leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Periodic meetings with relevant social workers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Links with interagency, Migrant Resource Centre, ethnic organisations</td>
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</table>
### Methods used to attract clients to/facilitate access to AMEP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes ✔</th>
<th>No ✔</th>
<th>No use ✔</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Meetings with Australian service organisations (eg Anglicare, Red Cross, Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul)

Involvement in community events (eg fairs)

Hosting of community events (eg breakfasts, open days)

Printed information provided to current students for distribution

Current students asked to comment on compatriots’ reasons for non-attendance

Publicity on availability of childcare

Childcare provided/arranged in parental language(s)

Assistance with transport

Other useful strategies: Please provide details, with reference to specific groups (eg individual ethnic communities, mothers of young children, Islamic women, the elderly, illiterate immigrants or refugees) where appropriate.

Colocation with DIMA settlement service

Colocation with other organisations relevant to immigrants’ needs

Letterbox drops in areas of high migrant concentrations

Information leaflets made available at eg doctors’ surgeries, chemists

Information leaflets translated into 3 relevant languages

Information leaflets translated into 7 relevant languages

Information leaflets translated into more than 7 relevant languages

Information leaflets containing partial information in relevant languages
Advertisements in local ethnic print media

Advertisements in relevant languages on ethnic radio

Other commercial advertising

Approaches to relevant religious organisations/leaders

Periodic meetings with relevant community leaders

Periodic meetings with relevant social workers

Meetings with Australian service organisations
(eg Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul)

Printed information provided to current students for distribution

Current students asked to comment on compatriots’ reasons for non-attendance

Publicity on availability of child care

Child care provided/arranged in parental language(s)

**Information provided with questionnaire**

AMEP providers and agencies involved in providing settlement information will find attached to this letter a short list of the mechanisms commonly used by providers to attract clients to the AMEP. As a preliminary to our meeting, they are asked to indicate the extent to which they have used and/or found each of these mechanisms successful in attracting clients. I would very much appreciate it if responses could be faxed to me at (02) 62473610 before Saturday 10 July.

1 ‘No use’ means the approach has been tried at least once and has not proved cost effective; where the response applies in particular to a specific community, more than to others, respondents are welcome to write in the name of the community concerned.
### Offshore Arrivals: 1996 to 1999

| Migration Category | All Settlers | NESB Adults (yob<81) | Very Good | Good | Poor | Nil | Not Stated | Need (x Vgood) | ARMS Registered | AMEP Enrolment | % reg/need | % enr/need | % NESB adults with need |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------|------|------|-----|-----------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Family            | 73744       | 43839                | 5410      | 6107 | 11035| 5858| 15429     | 35491          | 20325         | 18296        | 57%         | 52%         | 81.0%                  |
| Humanit.          | 39161       | 24662                | 738       | 2091 | 5578 | 6758| 9491      | 23456          | 20808         | 18557        | 89%         | 79%         | 95.1%                  |
| Others            | 20888       | 508                  | 242       | 18   | 62   | 42  | 144       | 170            | 123           | 100          | 72%         | 59%         | 33.5%                  |
| Skilled           | 110256      | 41697                | 30148     | 537  | 9703 | 863 | 446       | 11223          | 8392          | 6556         | 75%         | 58%         | 26.9%                  |
| Temporary         | 24473       | 16769                | 2092      | 2335 | 2969 | 1100| 8273      | 12640          | 8574          | 7817         | 68%         | 62%         | 75.4%                  |
| **Total**         | **249,722** | **127,475**          | **38,630**| **11,088** | **29,347** | **14,621** | **33,783** | **74,909** | **58,222** | **51,326** | **78%**     | **69%**     | **58.8%**               |

* The bold figures in the 'Total' rows under the 'Need (x Vgood)' column do not represent the sum of the figures directly above them. As explained more fully in the text this is because the apportionment of 'Not Stated' across the other categories is based on an apportioning pattern unique to each category, and the 'Total' rows are treated as distinct categories.
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<th>%</th>
<th>1997 Need</th>
<th>AMEP Regist.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1998 Need</th>
<th>AMEP Regist.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1999 Need</th>
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<td>71.4%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4

Summary of recommendations

The following recommendations appear at the end of relevant sections of this report.

Chapter 2: Information flows and bottlenecks

1 That DIMA examine the feasibility of a systematic means of assisting community groups and individuals to readily identify whether or not individuals have AMEP entitlements (subject to assessment of fluency levels) through:

   • a new categorisation of visas so that all visas conferring an entitlement to AMEP registration have a simple, binary alphanumeric identifier: if the identifier is included in the visa category, it includes an AMEP entitlement, if not, there is none;

   • a study of the feasibility of expanding this approach to identify Special Preparatory Program entitlements within a new system;

   • a review of actual practice by locally engaged staff in passing on the standardised information provided to them.

2 That DIMA, in consultation with providers, develop a promotional strategy, including a range of resources in key languages, promoting the importance of learning Australian English for successful settlement, and featuring the success of AMEP graduates. These materials should be made available or given to applicants at the time of visa approval, posted on the DIMA website and promoted through ethnic media (radio, TV and print) as part of a national media campaign. The resources should be checked for cultural appropriateness and include:

   • an attractive package containing essential information and referral points;

   • focus on successful case studies from under-represented groups explaining the attractiveness of pathways to improved English, and ultimately employment and successful settlement;

   • a generic video promoting the importance of learning English, incorporating material made available by providers, and addressing common misperceptions relating to the focus, methodology and image of the AMEP.

3 That, where possible, arrangements should be made for groups of illiterate immigrants to view a video in their own language pre-departure and to receive oral advice on any questions they may have about their AMEP entitlements and obligations as a result of their viewing the video.

4 That DIMA review annually the accuracy of material provided and the adequacy of the budget allocated to promotional activities.
5 That DIMA assess the cultural appropriateness of the successful Orientation Program conducted in Belgrade to other major immigrant source countries, particularly those currently under-represented in the AMEP, with a view to the possible introduction of such a program in appropriate locations.

6 That providers allocate sufficient resources to ensure ongoing systematic liaison with and feedback from key local communities and review annually:
   • the effectiveness of their initial contact and assessment procedures;
   • their consultative mechanisms, in terms of:
     – the numbers and types of community groups and agencies consulted;
     – the frequency and manner of and criteria for measuring effectiveness of consultation;
     – relationships with local TAFE (Technical and Further Education) colleges and schools in respect of referrals, with a view to exploring the establishment of joint initiatives and opportunities for extending reach.

7 That DIMA commission a study to identify cases of students successfully accessing employment and training pathways as a result of their enrolling in the AMEP to be used in publicity, promotion, websites, brochures, etc.

Chapter 3: Initial settlement needs and impediments to access

8 That, where possible, all childcare should be provided on site, or close to the AMEP centre.

9 That providers negotiate with their childcare managers to enable mothers to spend at least several days familiarising themselves with childcare arrangements and that such arrangements be suitably publicised to relevant community groups.

10 That DIMA consider options for introducing a transport voucher system for clients who do not qualify for other government assistance with transport, and a trial in one or more States.

Chapter 4: Program delivery constants and options

11 That providers consult with community organisations, which are representative of key under-reached communities, concerning their potential interest in more flexible delivery of AMEP, including:
   • specific targeted courses (eg ‘the Australian workplace’, ‘Employment for new arrivals’);
• courses specifically for women/mothers/carers of young children;
• less intensive courses;
• courses at non-standard hours, notably between 10.00 am and 2.00 pm;
• alternative venues, particularly in any locations the communities themselves may wish to nominate/make available;
• on-going consultative arrangements.

12 That providers consult representatives of their key communities about the appropriateness of developing strategies for greater use of bilingual teachers or teacher aides.

13 That DIMA in its consultations with community organisations seek their views on the priority to be attached to the promotion of distance learning whether in 'stand alone' mode, interactive use on-line, or as a supplement to less intensive forms of tuition.

14 That DIMA consider allowing providers to reimburse home tutors’ travel costs up to an agreed limit.

15 That DIMA consult providers about the desirability of its funding the development of resources nationally which would cater to the interests of special groups (e.g. 'English for Childbirth', 'The Australian workplace', and illiterate students who do not speak English).

16 That DIMA conduct a review of the impact of assessment on the reach patterns of those students who may be most threatened by the association of schooling with testing and failure and, if necessary, review alternatives to assessment as a means of measuring AMEP outcomes in the case of such students.

17 That, as part of a promotional strategy, DIMA commission a trial of vouchers advising potential clients of their possible entitlements. The strategy should, in consultation with providers and relevant community groups:
• identify a source country (or a limited number of source countries from different language and cultural groups) with projected significant future immigrant numbers and currently of low reach;
• design, and distribute at entry points, the vouchers in the recipients’ language, providing contact details of provider(s);
• monitor and review the effectiveness of the strategy.

18 That, in the next tendering round consultation with providers, DIMA give greater emphasis to a communication/publicity strategy directed to community groups and welfare agencies to address concerns about any changes to delivery arrangements, and promote the benefits of greater flexibility in provision.
Chapter 5: Needs of specific groups

19 That, in the interests of encouraging illiterate students to register and maintain enrolment, DIMA reconsider the importance attributed to English literacy for all as an outcome of the AMEP, allowing greater flexibility to providers to focus on clients' own perceptions of their priorities amongst the four macroskills.

20 That providers, together with DIMA and members of the Vietnamese communities, consider the appropriateness of a simple bilingual national registration form to be made widely available by providers through Vietnamese and other bodies (eg childcare centres, grocers' shops, surgeries etc), to be completed before any placement interview, with this strategy being evaluated and extended to other language groups if it proves effective.