

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

Submission on the Evaluation of the AMEP New Business Model (NBM)

April 2019

About MYAN

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) is the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those who work with them.

MYAN works in partnership with young people, government and non-government agencies at the state and territory and national levels to ensure that the particular needs of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are recognised, and to support a coherent and consistent approach to addressing these in policy and service delivery. MYAN undertakes a range of policy and sector development activities, and supports young people to develop leadership skills and networks.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds demonstrate high levels of resilience and resourcefulness and have the potential to be active participants in and contributors to Australian society. However, they can face particular barriers to accessing services and opportunities, including language, culture, limited social capital and unfamiliarity with Australian systems and processes (including the service system), racism and discrimination. These factors can place them at a social and economic disadvantage within Australian society, which can mean they are at higher risk of social and economic isolation. MYAN believes that a targeted approach to policy and service delivery is essential to addressing these barriers.

MYAN has developed the *National Youth Settlement Framework* to support a targeted and consistent approach to addressing the needs of newly arrived young people settling in Australia.

About this submission

MYAN welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on the evaluation of the AMEP New Business Model (NBM). This submission provides a national perspective, drawing on the MYAN's breadth of experience working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, their communities, and the youth and settlement sectors across Australia. This submission focuses on young people from refugee backgrounds aged 12 to 24.

1. Introduction

In 2016, 45% of all young people in Australia aged 12 to 24 were from refugee and migrant backgrounds.¹ Young people make up a significant proportion of Australia's Migration Program and Humanitarian Program. In the 2017/18 financial year, young people aged 12 to 24 made up 26% of all arrivals under the Humanitarian Program, 21% of the Family stream and 7% of the Skill stream of the Migration Program. They comprise 14% of all arrivals under all migration categories. Young people aged 18 to 24 made up 59% of youth arrivals in all migration categories and more than half (51%) of the humanitarian youth arrivals².

Young Australians from refugee and migrant backgrounds have enormous potential to be active participants in and contributors to Australian society.³ They are a diverse population group who commonly display immense resilience and resourcefulness. They come to Australia with an array of strengths and capabilities and are often highly motivated to succeed in education and embrace the opportunities available to them.⁴ However, they also face particular challenges in accessing the support and opportunities they need to navigate the demands of building a new life in a new country, including education, training and employment transitions.

English language skills and education are essential foundations for social, economic and civic participation and critical for young people's successful settlement in Australia⁵. Their access to employment is highly dependent on successfully developing English language skills.⁶ Refugees' and migrants' employment prospects are determined by a combination of their level of education or technical skills, and their ability to communicate in the local language⁷, as well as other aspects of settlement, including their social capital, diversity of their networks, family dynamics, etc.⁸ In addition to employment and education/training opportunities, limited English language skills can impact on young people's capacity to develop bridging social capital (networks outside of their own linguistic/cultural community and limit their opportunities for access to diverse friendship groups.⁹ This can in turn impact on successful social, economic and civic participation.

¹ VicHealth, Data61, CSIRO & MYAN (2017) Bright Futures: Spotlight on the wellbeing of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, p. 6.

² Statistics were sourced directly by MYAN from the Department of Social Services (DSS) on 25 October 2017. Data includes all permanent (or provisional) settlers who arrived between 1 July 2016 and 30 June 2017. All data presented is accurate as at this date within noted caveats of the Settlement Database (SDB).

³ Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) (2016) National Youth Settlement Framework, Melbourne: MYAN, p. 4.

⁴ See Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson (2009). Good Starts for recently arrived youth with refugee backgrounds: Promoting wellbeing in the first three years of settlement in Melbourne, Australia. Melbourne: La Trobe Refugee Research Centre, p. 15.

⁵ Rioseco, P & Liddy, N (2018) Settlement outcomes of humanitarian youth and active citizenship: Economic participation, social participation and personal wellbeing. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. Available at:

https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/1804_bnla_settlement_outcomes_of_humanitarian_youth_research_summary.pdf p. 2.

⁶ MYAN (2018) Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of jobactive. Melbourne: MYAN.

⁷ McHugh, M & Challinor, A (2011) Improving Immigrants' Employment Prospects through Work-Focused Language Instruction, Washington D.C.: Migration Policy Institute.

⁸ MYAN (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration: Inquiry into Settlement Outcomes. Melbourne: MYAN, p. 12.

⁹ Wyn, J, Khan, R & Davvand, B (2019) Multicultural Youth Australia Census Status Report 2017/18. Melbourne: Youth Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, Research Unit in Public Cultures, School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. p. 24.

After 18 months in Australia, refugees and migrants with good English skills are 70% more likely to have a job than those with poor English. 85 % of refugees who speak English very well participate in the labour market compared to 15% who cannot speak English.¹⁰

2. Concerns with AMEP

2.1 Varying availability of youth-specific AMEP programs

Some AMEP service providers offer youth-specific courses for clients under the age of 25 years. These are designed to provide a greater level of support for young people who require more intensive English language tuition. Youth-specific courses are tailored programs with both a social and educational focus, which target the specific needs of young people. Courses are developed by AMEP service providers in partnership with local schools, community groups, youth services and the vocational education sector.¹¹

In areas where there are no youth specific AMEP classes, some young people find it difficult to remain engaged in AMEP courses as they have been designed for the adult cohort. Youth-specific English classes are much more effective in supporting young people to learn English and to transition to further education. Young people have better learning outcomes when they are placed in targeted youth programs, as they are specifically tailored to the young people's language, educational and socio-emotional needs.

These classes also offer peer-to-peer learning opportunities, support development of social connections and relationships, and provide opportunities for young people to undertake other important processes in the settlement journey, including establishing intercultural relationships and networks¹². While the availability of such programs has increased, and youth-specific language classes have been made available in some states and territories for a number of years, there is no national consistency, recognition or programming/funding imperatives to provide youth-specific classes as the best approach to EAL for young people.

2.2 Access to AMEP by disengaged young people

Since 2011, AMEP has been available to 15 to 17 year olds who enrolled in school upon arrival, but have subsequently disengaged from school in the first year after arrival in Australia. In these situations, AMEP staff liaises with local schools to facilitate the transition into AMEP for those young people who have dropped out of the school system. However, young people may not always be referred to AMEP as there is no formal referral process.¹³ This lack of structured support can be a hindrance for some young people, particularly given their heightened vulnerability for those young people disengaged from school.

Young people may also be referred to AMEP more than 12 months after their arrival to Australia. In

¹⁰Centre for Policy Development (2017) Settling Better. Available at: <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Settling-Better-Report-20-February-2017.compressed.pdf>

¹¹ Department of Education and Training (2018) English classes for eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants in Australia. Available at: https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/amep_factsheet_-_updated_31_july_2018.pdf p. 4.

¹² MYAN (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. Melbourne: MYAN.

¹³ ACIL Allen Consulting (2015) AMEP Evaluation. Melbourne: DET.

the past, this meant expiration of the young people's eligibility for the program¹⁴. The extensions made available for young people with the 2018-2019 Budget measures allowing young people to engage AMEP 12 months after their arrival have been a welcome development to overcome this issue. However, a young people's disengagement from school could have various different causes – i.e. different than the reasons needed for granting exemption of access post-12 months.

Greater engagement with - and information provision to - schools about this referral process is required. Schools need to support adequate assessment and identification of English language needs early (before enrolment into mainstream education) to ensure young people can access the most appropriate English language supports and education options from the outset.¹⁵

A recent positive initiative from AMEP is the introduction of a new innovative projects fund¹⁶. One successful project in 2017-2018 was a mentoring project for disengaged youth aimed at strengthening connections between AMEP and services/supports in the local community.¹⁷

AMEP's focus on disengaged youth, while a welcome development, requires a nationally consistent approach and formal referral procedures between schools and AMEP providers to work well for all young people.¹⁸ While AMEP providers delivering youth-specific classes might be better placed in these process of referral and ensuring engagement with disengaged young people, in areas where there are no AMEP providers with youth specific classes, links with schools and referrals from schools to AMEP may be more problematic.

2.3 Insufficient hours for transition to employment or further education

A 2015 review of AMEP found that expecting refugees and migrants to attain functional English after 510 hours of tuition was 'unattainable and unrealistic' given the low-level of English that some refugees and migrants possessed.¹⁹ Evidence from the program itself and from language learning research is clear that the amount of time allowed in AMEP is totally inadequate for eligible learners to gain adequate proficiency in English.²⁰ To address these issues, AMEP Extend was introduced in 2017. AMEP Extend is a capped program that offers up to 490 hours of additional tuition to eligible AMEP clients who have almost exhausted their 510 hour entitlement without achieving their English language proficiency goals. AMEP Extend can be used in either the Pre-employment English or Social English tuition streams for students participating in general tuition either in the classroom or via distance learning.²¹

¹⁴ MYAN (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. Melbourne: MYAN.

¹⁵ MYAN (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes. Melbourne: MYAN.

¹⁶ Department of Education and Training (2018) Adult Migrant English Program Innovative Projects Fund 2017-18. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.au/news/adult-migrant-english-program-innovative-projects-fund-2017-18>

¹⁷ The 'AMEP Youth Mentoring Program' aims to reconnect disengaged youth with AMEP through providing a structured and trusting relationship between AMEP youth clients and members of the local community engaged in community, youth and counselling services or other related fields. This program pilots an engagement program specifically designed to assist young AMEP clients and provide support and guidance through a youth specific mentoring program.

¹⁸ ACTA has also suggested development of English focussed education and training pathways for young people at risk as part of its National Strategy For Language In Education And Training in the shape of a coordinated network of flexible, needs based first and 'second chance' education and training across schools, AMEP, ACE and TAFE within MYAN's National Youth Settlement Framework. For more see, Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2018) National Strategy For Language In Education And Training. Available at: http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/596_ACTA_language_in_education_and_training_strategy_November_2018.pdf p. 13.

¹⁹ Productivity Commission (2016). Migrant Intake into Australia Inquiry Report No. 77. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

²⁰ Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2017) Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes.

²¹ Department of Education and Training (2018) *English classes for eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants in Australia*. Available at: https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/amep_factsheet_-_updated_31_july_2018.pdf p. 4.

AMEP's approach of limiting English tuition with set hours, despite the increase in hours with AMEP extend, has its own limitations, especially as the tuition delivered during the set 510 hours had not provided the English proficiency necessary for mainstream education, vocational training, and employment, especially for young people from refugee backgrounds with low or no previous education prior to arrival in Australia.²² The 510-hour restriction has left a sizeable number of low proficiency learners who have completed their hours with no viable pathway into further English tuition.

These learners' access to the newly introduced Skills for Education and Employment (SEE) program with the new AMEP contract is also blocked by the eligibility. Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) criticized the SEE program, as access to SEE is limited due to exclusions of various visa categories and/or people who cannot meet the Program's Key Performance Indicators, although SEE is "essentially the only English learning pathway from AMEP". SEE Program aims to "provide language, literacy and numeracy training to eligible job seekers, to help them to participate more effectively in training or in the labour force". The program has a diverse client base defining them all as job seekers, i.e. refugees and migrants, people born and schooled in Australia, and Indigenous speakers of English, however it does not consider different learning needs of these groups.²³

While successive AMEP contracts have variously increased tuition hours entitlements for selected clients, no additional budget were allocated for these extended hours of tuition to the providers.²⁴

The final report of the Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration recommended a shift in AMEP's business model to focus on building English competency, in order to achieve better social and labour market integration prospects in Australia for refugees and migrants.²⁵

Furthermore, the proficiency level at which young people become ineligible for further AMEP assistance (i.e. functional English) is generally considered insufficient for employment, VET or higher education.²⁶ This is particularly the case for young refugees taking AMEP classes. Only a minority of refugee young people aged 16-25 who access AMEP exit with the level of required English. As they often have a history of disrupted education, young people from refugee backgrounds require additional time and support to acquire sufficient literacy in English to cope with Australia's education and training systems. The level of English required for work placements also often exceeds the capacity of refugee clients. Many refugees are not proficient enough in English to undertake employment and work placements. Others leave AMEP before completing their English language-training in order to take up opportunities for paid work.²⁷ Whilst this may sound positive, it is likely to severely limit their job opportunities in the future due to their low levels of English.

²² Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) (2014) Submission for AMEP Review; Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 54.

²³ ACTA (2018) Background Paper: Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs. Available at: http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/591_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_25_May_2018_-_an_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf p. 7.

²⁴ ACTA (2018) Background Paper: Problems in the Adult Migrant English and SEE Programs. Available at: http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/591_Problems_in_the_AMEP_SEE_Program_25_May_2018_-_an_ACTA_Background_Paper.pdf pp. 24-25.

²⁵ Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2017) No one teaches you to become an Australian: Report of the inquiry into migrant settlement outcomes. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, p. 57.

²⁶ ACIL Allen Consulting (2015) AMEP Evaluation. Melbourne: DET.

²⁷ Centre for Policy Development (2017) Settling Better. Available at: <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Settling-Better-Report-20-February-2017.compressed.pdf>

2.4 Combining language training with employment

AMEP is not adequately flexible to support those who wish to combine part-time study and part-time work. While some AMEP providers have part-time and evening classes available, this is not consistent across the country. When there are no part-time or evening classes available, young people are forced to choose between working and learning English. Due to the financial pressures many young people and their families face, many feel forced to undertake employment and therefore have no option to continue their AMEP English classes²⁸.

In 2007, Sweden introduced 'step-in' jobs that provide employer subsidies contingent on participation in language courses. These payments ensured new migrants did not stop attending courses when they started a job, and compensated employers who were able to provide a flexible training environment and promote continued language proficiency. 'Step-in' has been successful, with nearly half of participants reporting regular employment in a follow up survey.²⁹

3. Recommendations

MYAN recommends that the Australian government:

- Develop a national youth strategy for AMEP to ensure that young people's needs are adequately met through the program, including:
 - Targeted funding for the delivery of youth-specific courses by AMEP service providers nationally, for clients under the age of 25 out of school or post school.
 - Investment in greater linkages between AMEP and youth settlement services as essential to the provision of AMEP.
 - Increased flexibility and expanded eligibility for all young people to access AMEP within the first five years of arrival.

²⁸ RCOA (2014) Submission for AMEP Review.

²⁹ Centre for Policy Development (2017) Settling Better. Available at: <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Settling-Better-Report-20-February-2017.compressed.pdf>.