



Major parties ignore crises in Australia's English language programs

The Australian Council of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) Associations today called on the major parties to address the national crises facing English language programs in adult and school education throughout Australia.

“Over the last decade, English language tuition for migrants and refugees has been eroded by successive government neglect and complacency”, ACTA President, Dr Michael Michell, said today. “Currently, neither Government nor Opposition have policies that address the real problems undermining effective English provision for children and adults.”

“The Adult Migrant English Program, which provides English language tuition for tens of thousands of recently arrived adult migrants with low levels of English, is currently in a state of turmoil”, he said. “There is an urgent need to reverse the disastrous market-based approach to outsourcing this vital settlement program and halt the current exodus from classes of both students and qualified teachers. The Government's so-called ‘new business model’ is destroying the Program.”

“At the same time, specialist English language provision in schools for hundreds of thousands of migrant and refugee students with low levels of English language and literacy is rapidly disappearing under devolutionary school autonomy policies promoted by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. These policies allow schools to use their Gonski funding ‘flexibly’ and divert needs-based funding for English language learners to other areas.”

“Currently, there is no transparency or accountability for how these funds are used to benefit English language learners,” Dr Michell said. “National commitment is urgently needed to ensure that Gonski needs-based funding actually reaches and benefits the students for whom it's intended.”

“Last year, in anticipation of the election, ACTA developed a detailed *National Strategy for Language in Education and Training* that specifically addressed these and other issues. In November, responses were sought from the Government and Opposition with a view to implementing the *Strategy* as part of their education and training policy in government. So far, neither party has responded to the problems or proposals in the *Strategy*.”

“In contrast, the Greens have developed a four-point national plan that addresses the ACTA *Strategy* and seeks to ensure effective English language support in the school, post-school and adult education sectors.”

“English language provision that places migrants and refugees on a pathway to full participation in education, training and employment is essential to the success of Australia's migration program and our culturally diverse society. Good English proficiency is vital for migrants' and refugees' contribution to Australian society and economic prosperity. Australia once exemplified world's best practice in English and settlement programs but these programs are now tragically in decline. Reversing this trend requires decisive national leadership and commitment which we are yet to see from either party now contending for Government.”

ACTA's *National Strategy for Language in Education and Training* can be viewed at: [http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/596 ACTA language in education and training strategy November 2018.pdf](http://www.tesol.org.au/files/files/596%20ACTA%20language%20in%20education%20and%20training%20strategy%20November%202018.pdf)

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