



AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF TESOL ASSOCIATIONS

PRELIMINARY SUBMISSION TO

The Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
inquiring into
the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

28th May 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	3
1. Introduction: What is ACTA?.....	4
2. This submission	4
3. Post-school EAL Programs.....	4
4. Questions needing answers	9
5. English language programs: gaps and problems exposed by COVID-19 pandemic	15
6. The possibility of a new vision and approach.....	31
7. Conclusion	34
Appendix A: Report from a teacher in a major AMEP provider.....	36
Appendix B: ACTA proposal for a Quality Assurance based method of allocating contracts for English language provision for adult migrants	38

ABBREVIATIONS

ACTA	Australian Council of TESOL Associations
ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
CSWE	Certificates in Spoken and Written English
DE	Distance Education
DET	(Commonwealth) Department of Education and Training
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
EAL	English as an Additional Language (Framework)
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ESL	English as a second language
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils
KPI(s)	Key Performance Indicator(s)
NBM	New Business Model, i.e. the 2017-2018 AMEP contracts.
NEAS	National ELT (English Language Teaching) Accreditation Scheme (Ltd.)
QA	Quality Assurance
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SCoA	Settlement Council of Australia
SEE (Program)	Skills for Education and Employment (Program)
SHARP	Skills Hub Administration and Reporting Portal
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
TAFE	Technical and Further Education (Institutes)
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1. Introduction: What is ACTA?

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) is the peak professional body concerned with the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

The Council comprises representatives from State and Territory TESOL associations, including their presidents. At the end of 2019, these associations' membership stood at 942, not including several honorary and life members.

Association members are TESOL teachers, consultants, curriculum developers and teacher educators in tertiary, vocational education & training (VET), community education, school and pre-school settings, as well as academics and researchers in fields related to teaching English and other languages.

2. This submission

The submission is specifically concerned with existing and especially anticipated effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers and managers of a range of **programs for students learning English as an additional language (EAL) in the post-school sector**.

ACTA is in process of finalising a survey to go to teachers in this sector, hence this submission is described on the cover page as *preliminary*.

ACTA therefore requests the Inquiry's indulgence in permitting us to make a late supplementary submission once we have the results from our survey.

We anticipate that this further submission will be ready in about six-eight weeks' time, allowing minimal time for our survey to circulate and gain responses, and for analysis and writing up results.

This submission is organised as follows:

- a listing of the **programs** that are the subject of this submission
- **indicative data** on the numbers of students and teachers involved
- **urgent questions** that we commend to the Inquiry
- a description of the **gaps and problems** exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic
- a summary of **key problems** with **proposals** to address them.

3. Post-school EAL Programs

3.1 Programs

The main post-school sector programs for learners of English as an additional language are:

1. **English Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS)**¹ in universities, technical & further education (TAFE) institutes, other registered training organisations (RTOs) and private colleges.

¹ <https://www.elicos.com/about-elicos/>

2. **Study Skills and Academic English programs** for both international and migrant EAL learners offered concurrently to support students in mainstream degrees, diplomas and certificate studies in universities, TAFE institutes and other Registered Training Organisations.
3. **the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)**, administered by the Department of Home Affairs.
4. **the Skills for Employment & Education (SEE) Program**, administered by the Department of Education, Skills & Employment²
5. adult migrant & refugee EAL learners in a variety of **community-based programs**.
6. adult migrant & refugee EAL learners in various **State/Territory labour market and English language programs**.

The suspension of immigration and international student intakes must and will have profound effects on all of these programs. For some – notably the ELICOS sector – these effects have been immediate but they will certainly worsen. For other programs, the effects will be dramatically apparent as students complete courses and are not replaced by new inflows.

Gaining information on EAL learners in State/Territory labour market and English language programs is beyond ACTA's capabilities, so this submission does not examine them specifically. However, we know these programs exist and are not insignificant. Students funded through these programs are often combined with those in the AMEP and SEE Program classes which our members teach.

3.2. Numbers

To properly assess the impact of the closure of Australia's borders on post-school English language programs, data would be needed. To ACTA's knowledge, there is no overall or coherent picture on student numbers and teacher employment in these programs. We suspect that even baseline data on student and teacher numbers in *each* of these programs is fragmented and/or non-existent. This lack of data is indicative of the problems exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, it is indisputable is that, over approximately the next 18 months, *the number of international and adult migrant students in English language programs across Australia will decrease by thousands*. The flow-on effect for teacher employment, provider solvency and loss of human resources and material infrastructure will be immense. If *any* of this program infrastructure is to be preserved, a radical re-assessment of what this sector offers our country – and a reset to ensure it continues – are required.

The remainder of this section presents the indicative data that we could locate in the time available.

² <https://www.employment.gov.au/skills-education-and-employment>

3.2.1 International students

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on numbers of international students arriving in Australia has been dramatic. February 2020 saw a 41 per cent reduction (61,400 people) Compared to 2019. In April 2019, 46,480 student visa holders arrived in Australia. In April this year, only 30 people arrived.³

International education is currently Australia's third largest export overall and is its largest services export.⁴ It contributes more than \$35 billion to the Australian economy. Student fees make up 26 per cent of total university revenue (nearly \$9 billion).⁵ These students constitute 37 per cent of doctoral and postdoctoral fellows undertaking university-based research. They are the largest source of skilled immigrants to Australia.⁶ These students and graduates are more than half the temporary migrants currently in Australia (approximately 730,000 out of 1.3 million).⁷

International students also contribute to TAFE Institutes and the wider VET sector's revenues.

Many international students are English language learners. As already indicated, it is beyond ACTA's capabilities to determine the **numbers in preparatory and concurrent English and Study Skills programs** in the university and VET sectors.

Although many English language learners will have passed English test requirements, others meet these requirements through English preparation (ELICOS) courses. ELICOS courses also offer short-term English tuition for young people who are not necessarily on student visas but rather hold working holiday and visitor visas. 2014-15 figures show these students contributing \$205 million in export revenue to the economy.⁸

Some of those in higher education (estimated on the basis of anecdotal evidence) have undertaken their schooling in English-medium schools, some also in Australian schools. Irrespective of their previous English learning and/or test scores, many international students continue to rely on Study Skills and English language support throughout their academic studies. English courses and concurrent support are crucial to the success of Australia's international student program.

Although the numbers currently in English language programs has shrunk dramatically, the medium to long-term future is unclear. The national cabinet has included inclusion of international students in its three-step COVID-19 recovery plan. Some are arguing that Australia's success in bringing infection rates under control will provide universities with a competitive advantage in attracting international students for 2021. The Prime Minister is reported as saying that the permanent migration cap of 160,000 places remains in place with the possible implication that international students could constitute a key component in maintaining this number.⁹

³ <https://www.9news.com.au/national/unis-asked-for-international-student-plans/f28636a0-e797-42de-ac2d-8fb413d58a26> (accessed 24/05/2020)

⁴ <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>, p. 8.

⁵ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-20/coronavirus-impact-on-universities-research-worse-than-gfc/12264606>
<https://theconversation.com/how-universities-came-to-rely-on-international-students-138796>

⁶ <https://theconversation.com/how-universities-came-to-rely-on-international-students-138796>

⁷ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/foreign-students-show-morrison-at-his-most-flexible-and-stubborn-20200515-p54tfr.html> For a report on the value of international education to the Australian economy, go to:

<https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>

⁸ <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf> p. 10.

⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/foreign-students-show-morrison-at-his-most-flexible-and-stubborn-20200515-p54tfr.html>

ACTA hopes the Inquiry will go further in clarifying the Government's intentions for opening our borders to international students. However, we are also afraid that the incentives to resume the international student intake will outweigh incentives to maintain quality English language and other provision, much less improve it.

It will be crucial to protect against poor quality provision and previous rorts in this sector.

3.2.2 Migrant students in universities, TAFE Institutes and the wider VET sector

ACTA is not aware of studies/data on migrant-background English language learners in Australian universities, TAFE Institutes and the wider VET sector.

The 2019 Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System referred only to the literacy needs of "disadvantaged Australians" in the total Australian population.¹⁰ The Review offered no data on the numbers of these people actually studying in VET courses, much less on English language learners.¹¹ It likewise made no reference to ACTA's extensive submission on these learners' needs, which was disappointing.¹² ACTA membership includes teachers of EAL learners in the VET sector, so we know they exist.

English language learners in universities and TAFE Institutes, including those from migrant backgrounds, may or may not have come through the Australian school system. Especially in the TAFE sector, there is considerable provision for students who are ineligible for or have progressed from post-school English programs for adult migrants (see next section: 3.2.3).

Given that both migrant and international student learners of English as an additional language access concurrent Study Skills and English support in universities and TAFE Institutes, it is likely that the fees of international students provide the main (or only) source of revenue that funds these programs.

The decline in international student numbers is therefore likely to have flow-on effects on the funds that support provision for local students.

3.2.3 Beyond the universities and TAFE preparation and English support programs: Commonwealth and community-based programs for adult migrant EAL learners

Indications of the **numbers in programs for adult migrants and refugees** are the following:

- the Department of Home Affairs website states that each year the AMEP assists around **60,000 new migrants and humanitarian entrants** to learn English. Most have skilled or family visas and around a quarter have humanitarian visas¹³

¹⁰ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/domestic-policy/vet-review/strengthening-skills-expert-review-australias-vocational-education-and-training-system> Chapter 8.

¹¹ Passing and unilluminating reference was made to the AMEP and SEE Program, p. 104.

¹² https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/598_ACTA_submission_to_the_VET_Review_-_January_2019.pdf

¹³ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/amep/about-the-program/background>

- the Home Affairs website lists **15 AMEP providers**, most which have numerous teaching Centres¹⁴
- the SEE program operates in **58 contract regions** across Australia¹⁵
- a January 2019 ACTA survey gained **439 voluntary responses** from AMEP and SEE Program teachers and managers
- a teacher survey conducted as part of an independent Evaluation of the AMEP in the first half of 2019 records **306 respondents**¹⁶
- a 2019 review of a review of community-based English programs for adult migrants and refugees by the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils (FECCA) and the Settlement Council of Australia SCoA) lists **225 providers**, which they say is not exhaustive.¹⁷

Reports on immigration intakes indicate a dramatic decline. The Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) states that the Government anticipates a 30 per cent drop in expected 2019-2020 net migration (271,000) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It cites the Prime Minister as anticipating an 85 per cent drop in 2020-21.¹⁸ As indicated in the previous section (3.2.1), another report proposes that international students who are granted permanent residency will be a substantial proportion of 2021 intakes.

Once current enrolments pass through English language programs, there will be no new students while borders are closed.

Unless eligibility requirements are radically extended beyond catering for new arrivals, *English language programs for adult migrants – notably the AMEP – will be wiped out.*

According to the SMH, the loss of new migration represents “300,000 missing shoppers, students, family members and skilled workers from the economy”. It points out that immigration is the driver in maintaining population numbers and its age-related balance. Migrants constitute 60 per cent (3.7 million) of the increase in Australia’s population over the past ten years.¹⁹

ACTA hopes that the Inquiry will vigorously pursue questions as to how the Government plans to restore the economy without also seeking to restore previous intakes of migrants seeking permanent residency.

¹⁴ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/amep/service-providers>

¹⁵ <https://www.employment.gov.au/see-providers>

¹⁶ Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs.

<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf>

¹⁷ http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FECCA-Community-Driven-English_WEB.pdf

¹⁸ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australia-s-dependence-on-immigration-faces-its-biggest-economic-test-20200501-p540xx.html>; <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/labor-internal-angst-at-kristina-keneally-s-call-to-lower-immigration-20200503-p54pd7.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/australia-s-dependence-on-immigration-faces-its-biggest-economic-test-20200501-p540xx.html>

3.2.4 Teachers and related personnel

As just indicated, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on English language teachers and other provider staff in the post-school sector will be devastating. Looking beyond the teaching profession to those who provide other services, for example Settlement Services for Humanitarian Entrants, the loss of employment is even greater.²⁰

Most teachers in post-school English programs are employed on short-term contracts or casually. As an indication, approximately 35 per cent of respondents (131) to the ACTA survey of AMEP and SEE Program teachers reported that they held permanent positions, all of which, we suspect, would have been in TAFE Institutes. 10 per cent (38) had three-year contracts, while just over 50 per cent (approx. 163) were employed for one year, one term, casually or as relief teachers.

It is likely that English support and Study Skills teachers are included in the overall 43 per cent of casuals and 32 per cent of fixed term (1-2 year) contracts in universities.²¹ It is reported that up to 21,000 full-time equivalent positions (or 16 per cent of the university workforce) will be lost.²² These will be largely casuals and those on short-term contracts.

ACTA has no figures on employment in the VET sector.

Current ABS figures indicate that since 14th March 8.1 per cent of all jobs undertaken by women have disappeared compared to 6.2 per cent of men's job losses.²³ English language teachers are predominantly female. As an indication, 78 per cent of respondents to the 2019 ACTA survey were female. Their unemployment will contribute to the overall imbalance in male/female unemployment figures.

The even more devastating prospect for English language teachers is that these job losses will only really take hold once currently enrolled students complete and **just as the Job Keeper and Job Seeker programs are wound back.**

The substantial loss of professional knowledge and skills in English language teaching will be aggravated by the lack of incentives to gain teaching qualifications in this field. Flow-on dismissals of teacher educators in higher education, many of whom are also in insecure employment will follow, together with a decline in language-focussed research.

4. Questions needing answers

ACTA is aware that the Inquiry is investigating a large number of serious and complex issues. We warmly welcome its work in endeavouring to place the answers to many crucial questions in the public domain.

We respectfully request the Inquiry to investigate the short- and longer-term effects of COVID-19 on Australia's English language programs for international students and other visa holders, and adult

²⁰ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/humanitarian-settlement-program/settlement-services-for-humanitarian-entrants>. According to this website, there are 5 service providers in 11 contract regions across Australia.

²¹ <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/economy/2020/05/23/the-end-the-university-boom/15901560009865>

²² <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6773319/how-are-universities-being-affected-by-the-coronavirus-crisis/?cs=17318>

²³ <https://www.smh.com.au/national/keneally-has-picked-the-wrong-fight-for-this-pink-collar-recession-20200508-p54r0p.html>

migrants and refugees. A crucial focus should be the human resources that underpin the success of these programs, notably teachers. Answers to these questions are needed, many urgently, so that Government, providers, teachers and those such as ourselves advocating on their behalf can gain some idea of what is needed, planned and should be anticipated.

Subsequent sections of this submission will elaborate on the issues relating to these questions.

Answers to the following questions – which are currently difficult or impossible to discover in the public domain – will govern the future of these many students and their teachers.

4.1 Questions regarding international students

- 1) When and how does the Government anticipate re-opening the country to international students?
- 2) Are any data available on the number of international students currently in Australia in ELICOS programs, including those on both student and other visas?²⁴
- 3) How does this figure compare with the numbers this time last year?
- 4) If no such data are available, will the Government seek these data and/or advise on who is best placed to collect it and how?
- 5) Given the huge incentives that attach to re-opening borders to international students:
 - a. what provision will be made to strengthen existing Quality Assurance procedures for educational provision – and specifically English language programs and concurrent support – to protect against inferior provision and fraudulent operations?
 - b. for example, will the Government require *all* English language providers for international students (public and private for-profit) to seek accreditation from a reputable expert QA provider, notably the National English Language Teaching Accreditation Scheme (NEAS)?²⁵
 - c. will the Government collect data on English language requirements for entry into mainstream higher education and VET programs, and specifically the lowering of these requirements in order to maintain student inflow?
 - d. will the Government ensure that both QA procedures and data on requirements for admitting international students to mainstream university and VET programs are easily accessible in the public domain? If so, how?

4.2 Questions regarding international and migrant students in English and Study Skills programs in Australian universities and TAFE Institutes

- 1) Are any data available on the number of international and migrant students in English preparation and Study Skills programs, and concurrent support programs, in Australian universities and TAFE Institutes?

²⁴ These data may be available from National English Language Teaching Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) and/or English Australia: <https://neas.org.au/>; <https://www.englishaustralia.com.au/>

²⁵ <https://neas.org.au/> Other QA providers are in the market place but ACTA either lacks confidence in them or lacks knowledge of their credentials as specialist assessors of English language programs.

- 2) If no such data are available, will the Government seek these data and/or advise on who is best placed to collect it and how?
- 3) Will the Government undertake to investigate and report in the public domain on the extent to which fees from international students are used to cross-subsidise English language courses and concurrent English/Study Skills support for those *not* on student visas, that is, English language learners who are permanent residents and Australian citizens?

4.3 Questions regarding immigration and programs for migrants and refugees

4.3.1 The AMEP

We respectfully request that the Inquiry pose the following questions to the officials responsible for the AMEP in the Department of Home Affairs.

- 1) How **many students were registered** in AMEP classes in:
 - a. January 2020?
 - b. May 2020?
 - c. May 2019?
- 2) How many **full-time, part-time and casual teachers** were employed in the AMEP in:
 - a. January 2020?
 - b. May 2020?
 - c. May 2019?
- 3) When does the Government expect **immigration to Australia to re-commence** and how is this recommencement planned in regard to the main visa categories, including humanitarian entrants and family re-unions?
- 4) Are AMEP teachers eligible for **the Job Keeper program**?
 - a. If yes, how many AMEP teachers are being retained through the Job Keeper program?
 - b. If some or all have been excluded, please explain the basis for their exclusion.
- 5) What estimates does the Government have for the **number of AMEP students by December 2020**?
- 6) How many AMEP teachers does the Government anticipate will be let go **by December 2020**?
- 7) Current **contracts for delivery of the AMEP** were originally due to expire on 30th June, 2020. With the AMEP's move to Home Affairs, contracts have been extended to expire in June 2021:
 - a. Is this still the plan for existing AMEP contracts?
 - b. If yes, when will tenders be called?
 - c. If not, what is the plan for calling AMEP tenders?
 - d. Aside from the time-line, what changes, if any, are anticipated in regard to AMEP contractual requirements?

- 8) What **provision for AMEP tuition** has occurred during the COVID-19 lock-down in regard to:
- a. teaching/learning remotely?
 - b. equipment and facilities for teaching/learning remotely?
 - c. equipment for students in accessing tuition remotely?
 - d. upskilling students to access classes remotely?
 - e. materials and resources for teaching and learning remotely?
 - f. class sizes in the remote learning environment –
 - (i) are teachers working one-to-one with students or in groups or both?
 - (ii) what are group sizes?
 - (iii) has the Department issues any instructions or guidelines regarding group sizes?
 - g. student assessments against –
 - (i) the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), and
 - (ii) the accredited curricula taught by different providers?²⁶
 - h. the provider payment system?
 - i. collection of data in relation to meeting KPIs?
- 9) What feedback and information has the Department received regarding remote tuition in respect of each of the following:
- a. students with **low proficiency in English but good literacy skills** in another language?
 - b. students with **low proficiency in English but minimal/no literacy skills** in another language?
 - c. **student access** to remote classes?
 - d. use of **interpreters and/or volunteers** in delivering tuition remotely?
 - e. **teacher workloads** in switching to teaching remotely?
 - f. **assessing student progress** remotely?
 - g. **teacher resignations** since March 2020?
- 10) Where contractual requirements regarding assessment and other reporting have been suspended during the period of remote teaching:
- a. what **“catching up” will teachers and providers be required to do**, once face-to-face teaching is resumed?
 - b. what support or assistance will Home Affairs give providers to compensate or allow for the increased workloads entailed in catching up?

²⁶ Curricula are accredited by Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and parallel bodies in Victoria and some other States.

- c. will some requirements be permanently waived so as to mitigate increased workloads?

11) On 7th February 2020, Acting Minister Alan Tudge announced a number of changes to the AMEP.²⁷

a. To what extent are *each* of the following still in train or planned for the future?

- (i) “reforming” the AMEP and “monitoring it more closely on an ongoing basis”
- (ii) trialling new ways of delivering English tuition, including:
 - “the ability for those already working to do language training in their workplace or online”²⁸
 - “providing childcare and English classes at the same locations so mothers can attend without worrying about dropping their kids somewhere else”²⁹
 - ““mums and bubs’ classes where mums can meet and learn with others in a similar situation”³⁰
- (iii) “from July, changing how we measure progress in the AMEP and ... monitoring outcomes more closely”.
- (iv) “exploring whether English language training can begin even before a person arrives in Australia”.

b. In the light of the COVID-19 crisis, have any changes to the above plans been made and if so, what are they?

12) Is the Department of Home Affairs planning to act on the recommendation from the 2019 independent Evaluation of the AMEP that it should “*prioritise the development of a robust information management system*”?³¹

a. If yes:

- (i) when?
- (ii) what is the budget for this?
- (iii) what are the implications for this system of the planned changes to how progress is measured in the AMEP? (see Question 11 (iii) above)
- (iv) what impact has the COVID-19 crisis had on these plans?

b. If no, why not?

²⁷ URL:<https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/davidcoleman/Pages/address-menzies-research-centre-20200207.aspx>

²⁸ The forthcoming ACTA survey will probe teachers’ experiences in teaching remotely, including on-line. Home Affairs has also commissioned Lynda Wyse Associates to conduct a survey that includes a number of questions as to how remote teaching has functioned during the lock-down.

²⁹ AMEP providers already offer childcare. It is difficult to know what the announcement targets here.

³⁰ We assume this reference is to Community Hubs.

³¹ Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf> p. 23

4.3.2 The SEE Program

We respectfully request that the Inquiry pose the following questions to the officials responsible for the SEE Program in the Department of Education, Skills & Employment.

- 1) How many students were **registered in SEE Program classes** in:
 - a. January 2020?
 - b. May 2020?
 - c. May 2019?
- 2) How many **full-time, part-time and casual teachers** were employed in SEE program classes in:
 - a. January 2020?
 - b. May 2020?
 - c. May 2019?
- 3) Please provide data on the **language backgrounds of students** in each of the cohorts above (Questions 1 and 2).³²
- 4) What **changes to the SEE Program** have occurred during the COVID-19 lock-down in regard to:
 - a. teaching/learning remotely?
 - b. equipment and facilities for teaching/learning remotely?
 - c. equipment for students in accessing tuition remotely?
 - d. upskilling students to access classes remotely?
 - e. materials and resources for teaching and learning remotely?
 - f. class sizes in the remote learning environment –
 - i. are teachers working one-to-one with students or in groups or both?
 - ii. what are group sizes?
 - iii. has the Department issues any instructions or guidelines regarding group sizes?
 - g. student assessments against –
 - i. the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), and
 - ii. the accredited curricula taught by different providers?³³
 - h. the provider payment system?
 - i. collection of data in relation to meeting KPIs?

³² Data provided answer to a question in Senate Estimates, showed that, for Jan-April 2018 approximately 63% of SEE students were **adult migrant English language learners**, 35% or fewer were **English-dominant or English native speakers**, less than 1% were **Indigenous learners of standard English as an additional language/dialect**, although the latter was probably an under-estimation. Dept. of Education & Training SQ18-000619, Senator Doug Cameron provided in writing, Budget Estimates 2018-2019.

³³ Curricula are accredited by Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) and parallel bodies in Victoria and some other States.

- 5) Where contractual requirements regarding assessment and other reporting have been suspended during the period of remote teaching:
 - a. what **“catching up” will teachers and providers be required to do**, once face-to-face teaching is resumed?
 - b. what support or assistance will the Department give providers to compensate or allow for the increased workloads entailed in catching up?
 - c. will some requirements be permanently waived so as to mitigate increased workloads?
- 6) Current contracts for delivery of the SEE Program were originally due to expire on 30th June, 2020. **What is the current plan for calling for tenders?**

5. English language programs: gaps and problems exposed by COVID-19 pandemic

It has been frequently observed that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed important weaknesses and problems in Australia’s social and economic fabric.

This section elaborates on the problems and weaknesses in English language provision for international students and adult migrants and refugees: first, common problems in provision for both groups, and second, problems specifically related to provision for adult migrants and refugees in the AMEP and SEE Program.

A subsequent final section presents ACTA’s proposals.

5.1 Common problems in English provision for both international and adult migrant students

Overall, key problems in English language programs for both international and adult migrant students exposed by the COVID-19 lock-down are as follows.

- 1) A **marketised approach** governs provision of English language programs by public, private for-profit and not-for-profit organisations.
- 2) The sustainability of these programs is entirely **dependent on student numbers** – the fees paid by international students, and contracted payments according to hourly attendance (or some modification of this) for adult migrants and refugees.
- 3) These programs are **marginalised and fragmented** within and between institutions/organisations (public, for-profit and not-for-profit organisations) –
 - universities tolerate English language programs as long as they bring in funding and/or rents from for-profit providers on campus;
 - TAFE Institutes, for-profit and not-for-profit providers see contracts for adult migrant programs mainly or wholly as a revenue source.

The consequences of this market-based approach to provision are:

re programs for international students –

- 4) **gross failures in transparency and accountability** for the fees paid by international students for the services they receive, including the availability and quality of English and other support in some institutions, and the use of their fees to cross-subsidise all other aspects of universities' and TAFE Institutes' other activities (e.g. research, building programs, salaries, overseas travel).

re programs for migrant and refugee students –

- 5) **the constant and repeated undermining of stability, quality and appropriateness of programs** by short-term competitive contracting, which:
 - **massively disrupts programs and student access** approximately every three-four years as providers lose/gain contracts³⁴
 - **causes repeated costs and extensive waste** of infrastructure (e.g. rent hikes, removal expenses, property modification for classrooms and toilet facilities, loss of computers, furniture, books and materials, etc.) when providers change
 - subjects programs to **disruptive policy changes, new strategies for cost-shifting, and ministerial interventions** (see section 4.3.1, Question 10 above, and section 5.2.2 below).

re English language provision for both groups –

- 6) the absence of **comprehensive and easily accessible data regarding all aspects of the workforce** (e.g. numbers, gender balance, pay rates and conditions, job security, qualification levels & requirements), and hence the near impossibility of calculating the short- and long-term loss of employment, and the human and material infrastructure³⁵
- 7) **the casual nature and insecurity of work** in English language programs, despite the fact that many teachers have been in these positions for years and that many are also highly qualified³⁶
- 8) the overwhelming **predominance of females** in this work force, and hence disrespect for their work as demonstrated by the problems listed below
- 9) **widespread and gross exploitation** of this workforce's professionalism, motivation, commitment, goodwill, loyalty, free time, own money, and personal investment in knowledge and skills development, including gaining expensive qualifications.³⁷

³⁴ See section 5.2.6.

³⁵ Questions seeking these data have been repeatedly asked in Senate Estimates. The reply is uniformly that the Department does not hold this information because it is a matter for providers.

³⁶ In the January 2019 ACTA survey, 34 per cent respondents reported holding a Master's degree in TESOL, while a further 38 per cent held a specialist TESOL Graduate Diploma or degree (n. = 379).

³⁷ In the January 2019 ACTA survey 41 per cent of respondents (n. = 308) reported working an average of 9 - 24 unpaid hours per week in a 10 week period.

These problems are inter-related. Underpinning them are the false assumptions that learning English is easy, that anyone who speaks English can teach it, that international students can be treated as cash cows in higher education, and that professionalised English language programs are an indulgence.

The COVID-19 lockdown has entailed a rapid switch to teaching remotely. Because remote teaching is dependent on IT skills and use of English, this switch has often been demanding for low proficiency English language learners. ACTA’s anecdotal evidence – based on professional development activities run by our member associations during the COVID-19 crisis – is that the generally low paid, insecure, marginalised and feminised English teacher workforce has responded to remote teaching with enormous energy, imagination, generosity and commitment. They have acquired new pedagogic and technical skills, and have found and developed teaching/learning resources in an extraordinarily short time. (See Appendix A.) Our proposed survey will explore these issues further but we know already that many have worked long hours of unpaid overtime to ensure that their students can continue their learning in new and interesting ways.

The response of these EAL teachers contrasts sharply with mainstream degree programs in high fee-paying universities. In at least some programs, lectures and tutorials have been replaced by poor quality, often inaudible recordings of lectures from previous years. Support for student learning has been replaced and dominated by increased assessment exercises and longer exams. Both international and local students are often receiving very little for the high fees they are paying.³⁸

In short, the COVID-19 crisis has unmasked the weaknesses in **the marketised approach to English language provision** for international, migrant and refugee students in universities, TAFE Institutes, and other for-profit and not-for-profit organisations.

These weaknesses are: inadequate and inaccessible data, lack of transparency, poor and inconsistent Quality Assurance, and the fragility of employment for well-qualified teachers to underpin quality provision.

Once the immediate crisis passes, powerful perverse incentives exist to restore international student numbers in programs that lack adequate Quality Assurance, while programs for newly arriving adult migrants and refugees face extinction.

5.2 Specific problems in the AMEP and SEE Program: what the COVID-19 shut-down exposes

In addition to the problems just described, the COVID-19 lockdown has laid bare the following problems in Commonwealth English language programs for migrants and refugees.

5.2.1 Complex and dysfunctional eligibility requirements

In announcing changes to the AMEP just prior to the lockdown (see section 4.3.1, Question 11), Acting Immigration Minister Tudge cited the following data:

According to the Centre for Policy Development, 85 per cent of those who speak English very well are in the labour market, versus only 15 per cent of those who cannot speak English.

³⁸ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/international-students-rethinking-plans-to-study-in-australia-if-not-allowed-to-return-by-second-semester>

BNLA data shows that when identifying reasons for finding it difficult to get a job, close to 60 per cent of humanitarian entrants said “my English isn’t good enough yet”.

These statistics were set against the implied failure of the AMEP:

Only 21 per cent of people who exit the program have a functional level of English. This is due in part because participants on average exit the program after 300 hours of classes, well below the minimum 510 hours freely available. When surveyed, most participants (60 per cent) say they don’t complete the program because of work or family commitments, and others because they just don’t feel the class is useful.³⁹

In various interviews, the Minister focussed on the AMEP’s supposed failure, relying on the Shergold Review.⁴⁰ In regard to the AMEP, this Review was confused, hastily done and poorly researched. The Minister made no reference to the findings of the independent 2019 AMEP Evaluation and its more reliable, extensive and explanatory data and analysis, based on over six months’ work.⁴¹

In fact, those who exit the AMEP with less than “functional English” and those who leave prior to completing the 510 hours of available tuition are not necessarily or largely the same people.

The 21 per cent who exit the AMEP with less than “functional English” are **those who enter the Program with little/no English and minimal/no previous schooling or literacy in any language.** The 510 hour tuition entitlement (even with its various extensions) is manifestly insufficient for these learners. The 2019 AMEP Evaluation showed that they, along with other AMEP students, made significant English language gains.⁴² Humanitarian entrants, and especially women, tend to use their full AMEP entitlements unless they are hindered by their own or family illness or are compelled to gain employment.⁴³

³⁹ URL:<https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/davidcoleman/Pages/interview-virginia-trioli-abc-radio-20200207.aspx>

⁴⁰ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants.pdf>; <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants-government-response.pdf>

⁴¹ The assertion that people are dissatisfied with classes (with no statistical data) is refuted by the 2019 independent Evaluation of the AMEP, which found “across all 17 focus groups, students reported positive outcomes from their participation in the AMEP. They all identified improvements in their English as the most significant change resulting from attendance.” (p. 91) Asked to compare their level of English prior to commencing AMEP classes with their current ability, students reported their English proficiency improving “from low levels such as ‘no English’ or ‘a few words’ to higher levels of proficiency such as ‘being able to hold a conversation’, ‘seek employment’ or becoming ‘fluent’” (p. 20). The Evaluation also reported that “Students acknowledged the AMEP teachers as the single most important factor that supported their learning” (p. 21) Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf>

⁴² See footnote 38 above.

⁴³ The ACIL-Allen Review of the AMEP found that “Humanitarian clients are more likely to have greater English language needs ... and therefore will use their entitlement of up to 510 hours”. It continued: “Some clients are leaving the AMEP for entry-level employment which, due to low English language skills, may be insecure or may not support their longer term progression, as a result of inadequate language skills limiting their career potential. If such clients completed 510 AMEP hours, they would have a greater chance to attain sustainable employment and, in the medium and long term, of progressing to higher skill jobs. Other clients appear not to be completing their entitlement due to personal or health issues, or due to unsuitability of the primarily classroom-based tuition of the AMEP. Inflexible training hours also appear to be an issue in a limited number of locations. Some AMEP service providers are addressing this latter issue through the provision of training hours which meet the needs of employed clients or clients with family obligations.” (p. 56). https://acilallen.com.au/uploads/files/projects/158/ACILAllen_AMEPEvaluation_2015.pdf

People who exit the AMEP before completing 510 hours of tuition include those who are assessed as having gained “functional English” in a shorter time. **Reaching this level excludes them from the Program.**

Having exited the AMEP, some people from both groups may continue their English learning in the SEE Program, which is frequently described as a pathway from the AMEP.

The goals of the SEE Program are defined in terms of literacy and numeracy to meet labour market outcomes. These goals ignore students’ learning needs, pathways and backgrounds. Over 60 per cent of students are, in fact, English language learners but the Program is also supposed to serve mother tongue English and English-dominant speakers, together with Indigenous speakers of English and languages and dialects other than Standard Australian English.

Eligibility requirements for the SEE Program exclude many who do not meet certain visa-related requirements or who are not assessed by Centrelink as a “job seeker”, assessments which are inconsistently applied.

To mitigate exclusions from the SEE Program, AMEP tuition hours have been extended for some students. According to the 2019 independent Evaluation of the AMEP, only 62% of the 2017-18 capped funding for these extra hours (known as AMEP Extend) was spent. Nevertheless, providers reported the funding was insufficient and that decisions on eligibility for were inconsistent and unfair (p. 32).⁴⁴ These findings exemplify how complex eligibility requirements and fragmented provision block desired outcomes.

For providers, Centrelink and Departmental officials, deciphering and administering these complex requirements – not to mention their various contractual requirements (see section 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 below) – consumes many hours and human resources. With the separation of the AMEP and SEE Program into two different departments following the May 2019 election, these complexities must have intensified.

The underlying problem is that the Commonwealth provision of English language tuition for adult migrants is fragmented, overlapping and administratively costly. These problems create barriers for English language learners, and confuse and discourage them.

ACTA has argued for many years that neither adult migrants nor Australian taxpayers are well served by these complexities.⁴⁵ Our concerns have been echoed in reviews and reports ever since the 510 hours was legislated in 1992. Recent examples include the Centre for Policy Development whose submission to the 2019 AMEP Evaluation recommended:

Replace current eligibility criteria for AMEP with ‘needs based’ criteria so that people can access AMEP services at any point on their settlement journey without having to apply for exemptions.⁴⁶

Similarly, the Settlement Council of Australia consultations on the AMEP found:

The allocation of 510 hours per learner is arbitrary and not evidence-based. Some learners achieve functional English in this time, but many do not. Some are still unable to write their own name after this time. Many consultation participants favoured shifting to a needs-based allocation of AMEP hours.

⁴⁴ Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs.

⁴⁵ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf>
<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-publications/reviews-and-inquiries/inquiries/review-integration-employment-settlement-outcomes-refugees-humanitarian-entrants>

⁴⁶ <https://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/AMEP-Submission.pdf> p. 3.

Whilst there are opportunities for learners to have more than 510 hours of tuition, access to additional hours doesn't always work in the way was intended.

The five year eligibility period for AMEP is unhelpful. The time limit fails to recognise the competing priorities that new arrivals face. Many groups, such as women with caring responsibilities, do not access AMEP for several years after initial arrival. Participants suggested that the five year limit be removed from the contract, or at least extended.⁴⁷

The Refugee Council of Australia report on its consultations on the AMEP noted:

The lack of post-AMEP English development programs or options for further study. The SEE program is the only English learning pathway from the AMEP once clients have utilised their maximum number of instructional hours. This program also excludes clients in distinct visa categories and/or those who cannot meet the Key Performance Indicators of the program.

They recommended:

Removal of the 510-hour limit for the program and replacement with a needs-based assessment.

Also:

Greater flexibility for people to leave the program and return.⁴⁸

The 2019 independent AMEP Evaluation documented this same issue (see section 5) but its terms of reference precluded similar recommendations. It noted, however, that:

Only a minority of students—those with higher levels of English proficiency—thought that the 510 hours of AMEP tuition was sufficient for achieving a functional level of English. Many more students expressed a desire for an increased allocation of AMEP tuition. This was particularly important for students with the long-term goal of finding employment or pursuing further study. (p. 17)⁴⁹

The fundamental cause of many migrants and refugees not achieving desired English language levels are the **dysfunctional, incoherent, overlapping and multiple eligibility requirements** that attach to the AMEP and its supposed English language learning pathway, the SEE Program.

State-based labour market literacy programs create yet more fragmentation and complexity.

Negotiating these requirements is confusing and discouraging, especially for those with limited English.

Administering these multiple requirements is complex and time-consuming and for providers and officials.

The combined effect is to block pathways and restrict options for learning English.

Reports over many years have documented the insufficient tuition hours in the AMEP and, like those just cited, have recommended they be extended. These reports, like those cited above (and the

⁴⁷ <http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SCOA-AMEP-Consultations-Report-2020-PDF.pdf> p. 4.

⁴⁸ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/submission-into-evaluation-of-the-adult-migrant-english-program-amep-new-business-model-nbm/>

⁴⁹ Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf>

Minister’s announcement), often fail to examine the problematic relationship between the AMEP and the SEE Program, because the latter is officially designated as a basic skills program for job seekers. This neglect is now aggravated by the two Programs being located in two separate Departments.

The statistics cited by the Minister will not be affected by piecemeal proposals entailing further fragmentation and administrative costs. In contrast, ACTA’s proposals are directed to creating a unified Commonwealth English language program and simplified, easily administered eligibility requirements (see section 6 below).

The effect of the COVID-19 crisis: intensified administrative complexities and fragmentation

In the short term:

Inevitably, the COVID-19 lock-down will have intensified the complexity and costs in administering the multiple eligibility and related contractual requirements in the AMEP and SEE Program.

Some students do not have and/or cannot afford internet access. Many have accessed remote teaching by mobile phone, which is especially problematic for those with limited English and also those with poor eyesight. Many have also had their English learning hindered by living in cramped conditions with children and partners at home. Most have no access to printing (since libraries are closed) so cannot use printed worksheets if these are sent by providers.

These inferior conditions provide an argument for extending tuition hour entitlements. Instead, ACTA understands that students who had been given extra hours through AMEP Extend have had these hours cut. The reason is unclear to the teachers who have reported this to us. (See Appendix A.)

The medium to longer term:

If current AMEP eligibility requirements are maintained, the Program faces complete shut-down when the pool of new arrivals dries up. It would seem from media reports that immigration may possibly be suspended for some years.

At the same time, high unemployment levels will boost demand for the SEE Program. As already indicated, this Program is poorly attuned to the needs of English language learners in regard to eligibility requirements, program goals and, as will be elaborated below (section 5.2.2), other contractual requirements.

Meanwhile, the backlog of English language learners indicated in the Minister’s statistics will not be addressed. For example, the Refugee Council of Australia reports on just one specific group:

As at the end of 2018, there were over 15,000 people who had come by boat living in the community whose applications for refugee status are yet to be fully processed. Most have been living in Australia for many months or even years without access to an adequate English language program. As it is expected to still take years to assess all of these claims, many of these people seeking asylum will remain in Australia for a considerable period of time and will require English language skills so they can live safely and participate in the community. We recommend that all refugees and people seeking asylum, regardless of their visa status, have access to the AMEP.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/submission-into-evaluation-of-the-adult-migrant-english-program-amep-new-business-model-nbm/>

It does not seem rational to allow the AMEP, which is specifically designed to deliver English to adult migrants, to collapse at the same time as expanding the SEE Program, which is not fit-for purpose and conflicted in its goals and actual target groups. It is also unclear how many may find themselves blocked by existing eligibility criteria in regard to both the AMEP and SEE Program.

The collapse of the AMEP would entail not only large scale teacher unemployment but also the destruction of specialist teaching expertise, and administrative and material infrastructure that will not easily be restored when immigration is resumed.

If the AMEP were opened up to those adult migrants and refugees previously excluded or deterred from continuing their English, especially those who are unemployed, **the Program’s almost inevitable collapse would be mitigated, while those with low English proficiency would have the opportunity to develop their English and employability.**

5.2.2 Dysfunctional accountability requirements

The 2017 – 2021 AMEP contracts which took effect on 1st July 2017 mandated that the AMEP adopt **the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)** as the basis for determining:

- (i) **those with less than “functional English”**, a key eligibility criterion for accessing the AMEP, and
- (ii) **the Attainment Key Performance Indicator (KPI)**, which includes determining acceptable student progress (in both the AMEP and SEE Program).

The rationale for introducing the ACSF to the AMEP was to more closely align the AMEP and SEE Program, both of which were then administered by the Department of Education and Training.

This major change proved highly disruptive for the AMEP. The ACSF is inappropriate for English language learners, unnecessarily complex and time-consuming to administer and report against, and completely unreliable as the basis for any KPI.

The estimated cost of this change (over three years) was \$799,530 for the ACSF professional development workshops, \$861,207 for a new assessment task bank⁵¹ and \$4.3 million (or \$4.5 million over four years) for a new data management system.⁵² After nearly three years, the task bank is minimal and the data management system is yet to be operational (see section 5.2.4).

ACTA documented these problems from the outset. The independent 2019 AMEP Evaluation confirmed them.⁵³ Following this Evaluation and the release of the Government’s response to the Shergold review, the Department of Home Affairs commissioned the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) to undertake community consultations about the AMEP, in which the same issues were prominent:

A number of issues were raised regarding the current funding/contracting model, and the impact this has on AMEP delivery.

⁵¹ Dept. of Education & Training SQ18-000613, Senator Doug Cameron provided in writing, Budget Estimates 2018-2019.

⁵² Dept. of Education & Training SQ18-000564, Senator Jacinta Collins, 13 June question on notice no. 274, 2018-19 Budget Estimates. Also Dept. of Education & Training SQ18-000999, Senator Doug Cameron provided in writing, Budget Estimates 2018-2019. According to this reply, the system will be in place “at the commencement of the next contract, from 1 July 2020”.

⁵³ Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf>

These issues include:

- *An over-emphasis on assessment under the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF) model - many participants stated that this is not a suitable approach to gauge language learning. The overemphasis on assessment has inhibited learning, making it more academic, and less focused on effective settlement. Much of the class time is spent preparing for and conducting assessments, at the expense of actually teaching English. AMEP outcomes could be better measured using a broader set of social and economic participation indicators, including the social benefits of belonging to a language learning community - such as building networks and social capital*
- *Furthermore, ACSF reporting is restricting the ability of teachers, administrative staff and management to offer a flexible AMEP program which is responsive to clients' settlement needs. ACSF reporting is a significant burden for teachers, and results in:*
 - *too much focus on assessment;*
 - *client outcomes implicitly defined by an academic understanding of English, not one contextualised by individual learner goals, and;*
 - *not enough time leftover for teachers to focus on their core role of teaching English to help learners achieve settlement success.*

As already indicated (section 4, Question 11; section 5.2.1), the Immigration Minister's announcement prior to the lock-down stated that "*the Government is reforming this program and we will be monitoring it more closely on an ongoing basis.*" This monitoring implied the discontinuation of the ACSF, along with the alignment of the AMEP and the SEE Program:

From July, we are also changing how we measure progress in the AMEP and we will be monitoring outcomes more closely. I want providers to improve their performance and I want participants to commit to doing the work.

ACTA's consultations with members, our networks and all experts in the field have found overwhelming opposition to introducing yet another assessment method to the AMEP.⁵⁴ The clear recommendation is that the AMEP should return to a common curriculum with its own assessment system (see section 5.2.3).

It is difficult to understand how the consistent recommendations and feedback just referenced accord with reforming the AMEP by "*monitoring it more closely on an ongoing basis*" and requiring "*participants to commit to doing the work*".

The proposal to have a new assessment system in place by July 2020 (now abandoned) would have repeated the **chaos caused by the introduction of the ACSF**.

ACTA believes that ***developing any new assessment system is a gross waste of taxpayer dollars***.

⁵⁴ Given the demands made by the current contract and the real stress and pain it has caused – none of their own making – teachers have found the Minister's statement insulting and hurtful that they need to improve their performance and commit "*to doing the work*".

The effect of the COVID-19 crisis: accountability requirements in chaos

While the AMEP is being delivered remotely, assessments and “milestone” reports based on the ACSF have been suspended. ACTA understands that requirements for these reports have continued for the SEE Program.

ACTA understands that teachers have yet to be told whether and how ACSF assessments will be reinstated once the lock-down ends. Given the time consuming demands of the ACSF, there is understandable anxiety regarding possible “catching up” requirements.

Just prior to the shut-down, a project began to develop a new approach to English language assessment in the AMEP. It was subsequently suspended. ACTA has no information as to whether it will be resumed.

The COVID-19 crisis occurred in a context where the lack of credibility had been clearly acknowledged regarding the assessment method for determining AMEP eligibility/“functional English” and the data that supports the AMEP and SEE Program’s “Attainment” KPIs.

Just before the crisis, the Minister announced “*a change to how we measure progress in the AMEP*”. The misdirected and expensive project to implement this change has been suspended and possibly abandoned.

The Covid-19 crisis has left AMEP providers with **profound uncertainty regarding how eligibility should be determined, how student progress should be assessed and what accountability requirements they should meet.**

This uncertainty is compounded by **not knowing what will happen to the AMEP while migration is suspended.**

There is nothing good to be said about this situation. *However, this hiatus and the impossibility of meeting the planned date for implementing this change (July 2020) does offer breathing space for rethinking the move to yet another new assessment system in the AMEP, a move which would repeat the previous mistake that since July 2017 has plunged the AMEP into crisis.*

The root of this problem and its solution lies with curriculum, to which we now turn.

5.2.3 Fragmentation of curriculum content and resources

In July 2017, the new AMEP contracts replaced the common AMEP curriculum with provider “choice” of ASQA-accredited curricula. The previous common curriculum and its associated assessment system (the Certificates in Spoken and Written English/CSWE) had been developed, refined and supported by a wealth of materials since the late 1980s. It was also widely used in the SEE Program.

Gaining ASQA accreditation entails meeting the expensive, complex, one-size-fits-all requirements that apply to all Registered Training Organisations.⁵⁵ The 2018 re-accreditation of the CSWE took

⁵⁵ As one senior manager said, “ASQA would not know if we were teaching basket weaving.”

more than a year's work for two EAL educators, plus further interventions by ASQA personnel. The curriculum developed by TAFE Queensland, which is almost universally despised by its teachers, is still undergoing modifications.

ASQA-accredited curricula are, in fact, little more than assessment “frameworks.” Gaining accreditation does *not* include developing actual resources for teaching, undertaking assessments or professional development, all of which are uncoded and left to providers.

The consequences of curriculum “choice” of ASQA-accredited curriculum are –

- i. responsibility for developing teaching resources and assessment tasks has been **cost-shifted to providers and thence to teachers**,⁵⁶ which has therefore:
- ii. **undermined quality**,⁵⁷ and imposed:
- iii. **inappropriate and complex ASQA requirements** on AMEP curriculum, student assessments, curriculum and teacher qualifications, and
- iv. **fragmented provision**, and therefore required:
- v. a **meta-assessment “framework”** (the ACSF, now recognised as unsatisfactory) **as the basis of a common “Attainment” KPI**, which has therefore imposed:
- vi. **an impossible double assessment load** on students and teachers (one to meet KPI requirements and the second to meet ASQA requirements), and
- vii. undermined **the reliability and credibility of outcome reporting** in the AMEP and SEE Program, which has therefore:
- viii. led to **the now-suspended change to “how we measure progress in the AMEP”**, and has also:
- ix. made **previous reporting and data management for the AMEP obsolete**, leading to:
- x. the currently **unfunded, ad hoc, chaotic, time-consuming and inefficient data management procedures** now used in the AMEP (see section 5.2.4).

What the COVID-19 lock-down has exposed: impoverished resources for teaching/learning and student assessment

The switch to teaching remotely has placed extreme demands on teachers to produce their own teaching materials and further exposed the impoverishment of resources that has followed the changes just described. The task would have been easier if teachers had been supported by the previous common curriculum and resources, which included on-line resources. More effective teacher collaboration would also have been possible. In the event, ACTA is truly astounded at what these teachers have achieved in such a short time.

⁵⁶ When the CSWE was the mandated AMEP curriculum, provider tenders could not be distinguished according to the costs included for maintaining/developing curriculum and supporting resources, because these costs were the same for all providers. Providers now have a “choice” in how they bear this cost. It can also be avoided by using the free on-line English as an Additional Language Framework, resourced by the Victorian State Government.

⁵⁷ Teachers are now mostly left to develop or find their own teaching materials. Previous materials do not accord with either ASQA or ACSF specifications. Some resources have developed at provider (as distinct from teacher) level. They are poor quality, inappropriate, boring and uniformly directed to meeting assessment requirements.

We suspect that the suspension of ACSF assessment requirements has given teachers some welcome time to teach their students rather than continually assess them.

The assessment requirements attaching to ASQA-accredited curriculum have *not* been waived and must be met with the return to face-to-face teaching. At the same time as AMEP teachers face unemployment by year's end, they are dreading the work – and unpaid hours – entailed in catching up.

Included in the Immigration Minister's announcement was "*triallying new ways of delivering English tuition, including ... online*" (section 4.3, Question 11). The COVID-19 lock-down has provided an unexpected opportunity for this trial across the whole of the AMEP. However, it should be noted that teaching remotely includes working on-line but goes beyond it. Adult migrants are also using smart phones and various social media platforms to access classes and other interaction with their teachers. The forthcoming ACTA survey will explore teachers' estimates of this trial. The Department's contracted professional advisory firm, Lynda Wyse Associates, has also conducted a survey that includes a number of questions regarding teaching remotely.

As this submission was in its final stages, ACTA received a report on her experiences from a teacher with a major provider. It is included as Appendix A to this submission. Predictably, difficulties for low proficiency learners are reported.

Less predictably, this report indicates that providers may be unable to continue this trial even where it is proving successful. Rather, to off-set the loss of income and minimise administrative complexity, providers are re-directing students to the national Distance Education (DE) provider. In other submissions, we have recommended national *development* of DE materials but *local delivery of teaching* for precisely the reasons given in Appendix A, viz. that it allows learners to maintain personal contact with a local teacher and to mix DE with face-to-face classes, and for teachers to adapt resources to assist learners in gaining local knowledge.⁵⁸

The COVID-19 lock-down has exacerbated the fragmentation, inefficiencies, wasted energy and resources, lack of quality control and impoverishment of the AMEP consequent on the cost-shifting strategy of allowing providers (but not teachers) curriculum "choice". It is also allowing experimentation and innovation with teaching remotely, which unfortunately, it seems, will be curtailed because of its administrative complexity (see section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

5.2.4 Chaotic data management

Curriculum "choice" and the Attainment KPI based on the ACSF made the existing AMEP data management system largely obsolete. Providers were and still are required to submit data using the previous system (with reduced functionality) and a second system that accommodates the changes.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The 2019 independent Evaluation of the AMEP documented a number of problems with current arrangements for Distance Education. Time does not permit elaborating on these in this submission. Section 5.4, Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf>

⁵⁹ Initially, this system required *manual entry* onto Excel sheets of the data for approximately 23,708 individual students. Senate Estimates Question 19/306.

Repeated entry of the same data entry is often required and errors (due to the complexity and lack of system capacity) require further re-entries by providers.

When the AMEP was in the Department of Education and Training, it was planned to combine data management for the AMEP and SEE Program. Development of a new system (the Skills Hub Administration and Reporting Portal/SHARP) was approved in February 2018 with a budget of \$4.5 million over four financial years. Now that the Program has moved to Home Affairs and a new assessment system is planned, the SHARP will be unsuitable for AMEP use. ACTA has no information on what is now planned for the SEE Program.

Data management for the AMEP has been and continues to be a nightmare. It would appear that there is no budget in Home Affairs to rectify this situation.

The 2019 Evaluation of the AMEP recommended that:

The department should prioritise the development of a robust information management system (IMS) to manage the AMEP.⁶⁰

Effect of the COVID-19 shut-down

ACTA has no information on the specific effects of the COVID-19 shut-down on data management. We hope some will emerge from our survey.

However, it seems reasonable to suppose that the problems described above regarding eligibility requirements and student assessments must be exacerbating the inherent dysfunction and burden of current AMEP reporting and data management.

5.2.5 Provider payments tied to hourly student attendance

Until early in 2020, provider payments were largely based on hourly student attendance. Some changes have been made to ameliorate the worst effects of this system.

The main causes of student dissatisfaction noted by the Minister (section 5.2.1) are that, in order to be financially viable (or profit-making), providers maintain large classes at maximum permitted levels, irrespective of student English levels, educational backgrounds and needs.⁶¹ When numbers in class drop below what is seen to be financially viable, that class is combined with another one. Further disruptions to teaching are caused by continuous enrolments which admit new students to a class at any point in a term.⁶²

Effect of the COVID-19 crisis: providers bankrupted

As already noted, the immediate effect of the COVID-19 lock-down has been the switch to remote teaching/learning. ACTA understands that a drop in AMEP student numbers has meant even further instability in the individual students a teacher sees from one lesson to the next.

⁶⁰ Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf> p. 23

⁶¹ The maximum class size for some groups is 20 students and for others is 15. However, providers are permitted to over-enrol to compensate for variable student attendance. This can lead to classes with over 30 students in a given day.

⁶² The requirement to administer ACSF assessments on an individual basis divert teachers even further from teaching.

ACTA has anecdotal information that at least some AMEP providers are desperately attempting to fill classes, given the immanent prospect of no further students.

The combined impact of current eligibility requirements and payments based on student numbers will be bankruptcy for providers dependent on AMEP contracts.

5.2.6 Market-based contract allocation and governance of programs

Delivery of both the AMEP and SEE Program has been managed through a market-based system in which public, for-profit and not-for-profit providers compete for contracts. The current contracts brought the two programs in line in regard to contract length and use of the ACSF (see section 5.2.2 above). The current three-year contracts were due to expire on 30th June 2020, but as previously noted, AMEP contracts have been extended to June 2021. ACTA has no information on SEE contracts.

In numerous submissions, ACTA has documented the adverse effects of this marketised approach to the AMEP. In summary, short-term competitive contracting:

- **undermines AMEP participation** – data from the 2019 AMEP Evaluation show that participation rates drop with each contract/provider change; they recover in 2-3 years (in time for the next contract round); the current 2017-2020 contract saw a particularly large drop in participation
- is **wasteful, undermines quality provision, lacks transparency and discourages true accountability**
- is disruptive to **programming, staffing and planning** – as already described, the disruption of the current contract has brought the AMEP to crisis point
- **absolves Government from responsibility** for collecting and holding information on class sizes, teacher numbers, professional development, OH&S issues for both students and teachers, material infrastructure (from computers to whiteboards to toilets), unpaid teacher overtime, teacher short term contracts and casualisation⁶³
- **incentivises casualisation** of employees and erodes employment conditions, professional development and qualification requirements.

Regarding the drop in participation resulting from transitions between contracts, the 2019 independent Evaluation of the AMEP found that the switch to the current contract saw **46 per cent of those previously enrolled either discontinuing or not replaced by new enrolments**. The previous change of contracts had the same effect – a drop of 38 per cent – although not to the same extent. The Evaluation explained:

*AMEP enrolments ... were substantially lower in 2017-18 compared to both 2016-17 and 2015-16. This lower enrolment number is partly due to a significant number of AMEP students who did not continue in the program after the transition to the NBM.⁶⁴ **There were many service providers who changed and significant numbers of students did not transfer to the new providers.** The lower enrolment number is also due to the spike in the number of humanitarian migrants returning to usual levels as the 12 000 additional Syrian and Iraqi refugees accepted to Australia worked their way through the system.*

⁶³ Responses to questions on these matters in Senate Estimates routinely state that these are “matters for providers”.

⁶⁴ NBM = New Business Model, the term used to describe the 2017-2020 contract.

*The impact of the transition to the NBM can be considered in terms of student retention. As Figure 8 shows, **the proportion of students that enrolled under the previous contract and continued in the AMEP under the NBM in 2017-18 was 56 per cent.** This is lower than for all previous years in the dataset (when it was about 62 per cent). However, student retention from the first to the second year improved to 60 per cent in the first six months of 2018-19, indicating a return to pre-NBM levels of student retention. (our emphasis, p. 12)⁶⁵*

Exposed by the COVID-19 crisis: the fragility of a market-oriented approach to delivering social programs

currently:

Remote teaching has made it impossible to meet many of the requirements in the contracts which previously governed AMEP and SEE Program providers. Attempts to catch up on unmet requirements during the lock-down will increase the impossibly complex and large workloads carried by providers and teachers. Increases are inevitable in the already unacceptable number of unpaid hours.⁶⁶

in the short term:

Current uncertainties must be presenting the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Education, Skills & Employment with an impossible situation in devising contractual specifications for the next AMEP and SEE Program tender round.

Knowing when current contracts will end, providers often start work preparing their tenders long before the formal call, even a year in advance. The current uncertainty makes this preparation impossible.

ACTA sincerely hopes that, once the situation is clearer, **an appropriate and generous lead time** will be allocated between the call for tenders and the closing date.

Further, we believe that the **currently proposed date for the commencement of new contracts** (July 2021) must now be ruled impossible.

However, the delay in calling tenders will allow clearly unsatisfactory providers to remain in place. ACTA is aware of providers whose performance has been consistently unacceptable throughout the current contract.

in the medium- to long term:

The COVID-19 crisis has brought into clear focus some fundamental problems in Commonwealth programs for English language tuition: fragmented and incoherent provision, complex and dysfunctional requirements that destroy real accountability, the relentless undermining of quality, and a myriad of wasteful and unnecessary administrative costs.

These problems are the outcomes of the current market-based approach to delivering these programs.

⁶⁵ Social Compass, August 2019. Evaluation of the Adult Migrant English Program for the Department of Home Affairs. <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/amep-subsite/Files/amep-evaluation-new-business-model.pdf>

⁶⁶ See footnote 35.

It is quite unclear when immigration will resume but clearly – under current eligibility requirements payments that rest on student numbers – the AMEP faces shut down well before the end of 2020. Its teachers will join the forecast million unemployed Australians. Some may find work in an expanded but poorly targeted SEE Program. It could be argued that short-term contracting will allow for this flexibility. However, the short-term fix inherent in this kind of “flexibility” addresses none of the problems we have identified above.

A market-based approach is *not* directed to addressing the low levels of English proficiency among adult migrants and refugees. Rather, the approach seeks its own self-perpetuation by increasing fragmentation through competition and cost-shifting, and continually ratcheting up mechanisms that seek (unsuccessfully) to ensure accountability – as the Minister promised, “monitoring outcomes more closely”.

Allowing the AMEP to collapse – a foundation stone in the success of Australia’s immigration program since 1948 – would constitute a tragic loss of skilled human resources, institutional knowledge and investment in infrastructure.

ACTA’s proposals regarding eligibility and streamlining English language provision will prevent the AMEP from collapsing.

Rather than hurtling towards the next contract round with the impossible deadline of mid-2021, a genuine re-thinking is required as to **how the Commonwealth might provide stable and coherent quality English language tuition for adult migrants and humanitarian entrants.**

5.3 Community-based Programs

In 2019, the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils (FECCA) and the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) undertook a review of community-based English language programs for adult migrants and refugees. An overview of these programs is presented in the following table:

Overview of community program providers⁶⁷

Type of provider	Strengths	Challenges
Settlement organisations	Links with the communities, access to different services	Funding restrictions, limited places
Libraries	Free and accessible by all	Dependent on volunteers
Churches/religious organisations, libraries	Access to a broad range of the community through church and community services	Limited funding and resources, lack of specific understanding/ focus on refugee experiences and needs
Migrant/refugee community groups	Bilingual and strong links with community members	Limited funding and resources
Academic institutions	Qualified teachers	Expensive, access to communities

⁶⁷ http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FECCA-Community-Driven-English_WEB.pdf p. 14.

As already noted, the fragmentation of this provision is huge: over 225 providers. This fragmentation has its strengths in providing adult migrants and refugees with local, more intimate and informal learning experiences. Despite these strengths, these programs further complicate and confuse the pathways and options available to English language learners.

The continuity of these programs is even less secure than for the AMEP and SEE Program. Funding relies on chasing after short-term contracts to implement various, often changing Government programs and funds from other sources.

Several of the recommendations from the FECCA-SCoA report address the same issues as detailed above in relation to the AMEP and SEE Program, notably:

- *Acknowledge that, while English language skills are essential in the early settlement period, English learning begins at different stages in life and throughout life in Australia.*
- *Acknowledge that English learning is a life-long process.*
- *Develop a database with resources community driven English language programs providers can access.*
- *Ensure resources are available to ease access for all migrants/refugees to Australia to access English fitting their needs.*
- *Facilitate and encourage connections and collaborations between community driven English language programs, AMEP and settlement support providers.*
- *Acknowledge the need for community driven English language programs to complement the AMEP.⁶⁸*

In the community sector – as with all other English language programs – the COVID-19 crisis has exposed fragmentation, incoherence and the instability that is inherent in a market-based approach to provision.

ACTA anticipates that, as in the past, the Government’s response to the unemployment generated by the COVID-19 crisis will be an increase in labour market programs, from which these community programs will seek short-term funding.

A more effective, efficient less costly response would be to clarify and strengthen the mandate of both the AMEP and SEE Program, along the lines of Proposal 3 below, and to support high-performing community English programs that complement these two Programs rather than overlap with them.

6. The possibility of a new vision and approach

As in many other areas of Australian society and the economy, the COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to re-think how things are done.

ACTA offers the following proposals for the Inquiry’s consideration. We realise that their specifics may fall beyond the scope of this Inquiry. However, we hope they will provide the Inquiry with possible directions for its recommendations, including other further investigations.

⁶⁸ http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/FECCA-Community-Driven-English_WEB.pdf p. 5.

Problem 1: Data is lacking on international students and adult migrants who are English language learners in universities, TAFE Institutes and ELICOS centres

Proposal 1

The Inquiry should discover where and in what form these data exist, how they are collected and maintained if at all, and recommend on how such data can be made more transparent and easily accessible in the public domain.

Problem 2: Huge incentives will drive the resumption of international student intakes, providing fertile ground for poor quality teaching and support, rorts and cheating, and a lack of rigorous quality control.

Proposal 2

The Inquiry should:

1. investigate current provision for quality control in English courses for international student and other visas holders, and
2. investigate English language and Study Skills support for international students in universities, TAFE Institutes and other RTOs
3. develop recommendations on improving –
 - a. transparency in how international student fees are used, and
 - b. quality control in English language courses and concurrent support in universities, TAFE Institutes and other RTOs.

Problem 3: English learning pathways are blocked and confused by AMEP & SEE Program eligibility requirements.

Proposal 3

1. Adult migrants' eligibility for the AMEP should be defined *solely* with reference to an agreed level of English proficiency.
2. The cut-off level should be that required for entry into VET bridging and mainstream training and higher education (probably ACSF Level 4, CSWE 4, ISLPR 2+, IELTS 5).
3. Time restrictions on accessing the AMEP should be abandoned.
4. The SEE Program should be redirected to meeting basic literacy and numeracy needs for job seekers who are:
 - English-dominant and English mother tongue speakers whose education has been predominantly or entirely in an English-speaking country, and
 - long-term residents from overseas who are orally fluent in English.

Problem 4: The common national AMEP curriculum with its rich resources and integrated assessment system was replaced in 2017 by provider choice of curriculum, which has –

- (i) necessitated the introduction of an inappropriate, excessively complex assessment approach (the ACSF or its projected replacement), whose sole purpose is to provide a common, nation-wide basis for an “Attainment” KPI because there is no longer a common curriculum against which student progress can be assessed
- (ii) subjected the AMEP to inappropriate ASQA requirements
- (iii) cost-shifted responsibility for developing teaching resources and assessment tasks to individual teachers
- (iv) undermined the reliability and credibility of outcome reporting in the AMEP and SEE Program, and
- (v) made data management for the AMEP chaotic, time-consuming and inefficient.

Proposal 4

Return the AMEP to **a common national curriculum incorporating a variety of pathways tied to a common, in-built assessment system**, which is supported by a common national effort, including a fit-for-purpose data management system.

It should be noted that we are not arguing for a return to the old curriculum, which is now impossible because of the need to meet ASQA requirements. Meeting these requirements is necessitated by AMEP students’ strong wish to gain recognised qualifications. Rather, the Commonwealth should take ownership of the most acceptable existing curriculum (the Certificates in Spoken & Written English) and call tenders for a provider to maintain and develop it in collaboration with all other AMEP providers.

Problem 5: The allocation of AMEP and SEE Program contracts by a market-based short-term competitive contracting system has radically undermined quality, stability and coherence in English language provision for adult migrants. Providers who rely on AMEP contracts face bankruptcy as the supply of eligible new arrivals dries up. Although the SEE Program, as the supposed pathway from the AMEP, is liable to expand with increased unemployment, it is not fit-for-purpose in targeting adult migrant English language learners.

When immigration resumes, the necessary infrastructure, institutional knowledge and human resources will be gravely diminished.

Proposal 5

1. Ensure the AMEP's survival by replacing current AMEP eligibility requirements with a English single proficiency criterion – see Proposal 3 above.
2. Place English language provision for adult migrants and refugees on a stable, efficient, publicly accountable basis that is fit-for-purpose by –
 - i. radically modifying the current method of short-term competitive contracting with an approach that gives quality providers greater stability, flexibility and confidence in forward planning by:
 - ii. replacing current bureaucratically driven, inefficient and ineffective accountability requirements with:
 - iii. genuine, rigorous and professionally oriented Quality Assurance processes carried out by independent and assessors with appropriate expertise.

See Appendix B for the system ACTA has proposed for at least the past decade.

7. Conclusion

The COVID-19 crisis is a tragedy that has only just begun to run its course. The closing of borders to international students, migrants and refugees has inflicted and will continue to inflict huge economic and social damage.

Caught up in this tragedy are the English language teachers who provide many of these people with the English they need to undertake their studies, gain employment and contribute their skills, insights and talents to Australian society.

In the Canberra Times of 21/05/2020, Ross Garnaut wrote:

No other developed economy of comparable size has benefited as much as Australia from the easy international movement of people - for business, pleasure, education, and to build new lives as migrants.

Unlike most other developed countries, Australia is also located in a region of developing countries. This means it will be damaged more by the pain the pandemic is likely to disproportionately inflict on the developing world.

The challenge facing Australia is unprecedented. It will require solutions to match.⁶⁹

In the grand scheme of the economy, the fate of English language programs may initially seem relatively insignificant. However, they underpin many of the benefits Garnaut lists.

The only good to come from the closure of our borders is the breathing space it offers to think deeply about the problems highlighted in this submission and many other reports on the same topic. Starting from a clear and accurate diagnosis, we could re-examine the desired goals for post-school English language programs and how to get there.

Rather than quickly devised and ill-considered “announceables”, this careful rethinking will require honesty, imagination, true collaboration and the courage to take new paths.

⁶⁹ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6763524/further-to-fall-harder-to-rise-australia-must-outperform-to-come-out-even-from-covid-19/?cs=14246>

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed the frightening extent to which the post-school sector – and the wider economy – depends on revenues generated by international students. But these revelations have, to ACTA’s knowledge, not questioned the lack of transparency in how these students’ fees are used actually to support their studies.⁷⁰ It appears to be taken for granted that there is nothing unethical in using overseas students as cash cows. The frequent assertion that they receive quality education is rarely, if ever, questioned. ACTA fears that the imperative to resume this income stream will provide blind eyes even further away. Crude supply-and-demand principles are likely to prevail.

The ethical alternative would be, first, to uncover the data on the extent of these students’ English learning needs and what to date has been in place to meet them. Concurrently, Quality Assurance requirements should be examined and, where necessary, strengthened. They should also be made mandatory and administered by independent expert bodies.

Before the COVID-19 crisis hit, English language provision for adult migrants was already in disarray. This disarray had been acknowledged by various official sources. At both Commonwealth and State levels, these programs were, and are, sustained only by the dedication, commitment, knowledge and skills of an overwhelmingly female teacher workforce. Together with the programs they teach, this workforce is in grave danger of decimation by the end of 2020.

Responding to this disarray prior to the crisis, the Immigration Minister announced changes to the AMEP. These changes did not address the problems identified by the 2019 independent Evaluation of the AMEP, completely ignored the data presented in that Evaluation and confused the data cited. The proposed changes were piecemeal, often irrelevant and, where significant, misplaced and expensive. If anything, they would worsen the statistics cited by the Minister by further fragmenting provision and diluting teachers’ efforts.

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the profound irrelevance of those proposed changes. If followed through, they will do nothing to ensure that AMEP provision actually *exists* when immigration and humanitarian intakes resume.

In contrast, and in accord with numerous reports over many years, ACTA’s proposals would place English language provision for adult migrants on a new, simpler, targeted, coherent, fit-for-purpose, more efficient and cost effective basis. They would provide a foundation on which the AMEP could be rebuilt and regain the world-leading place it once had.

The Senate Inquiry into the Australian Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has until next year to investigate and report on its findings. It has the opportunity to ask questions to which answers are urgently needed.

ACTA sincerely hopes that the Inquiry will see its way clear to pursue the questions we have posed in this submission and initiate serious consideration of our proposals. We also hope that you will accept a further submission based on our forthcoming survey of teachers. Finally, our representatives would be pleased to appear before the Inquiry to provide further information and answer questions arising from these submissions.

⁷⁰ A Canberra Times’ article (28/05/2020) costs an individual university student’s education at \$20,000 p.a. <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6771137/our-universities-must-rethink-their-broken-business-model-or-risk-failure/?cs=14246> Fees in the order of \$45,000 p.a. are not unusual. See, for example: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/international-students-rethinking-plans-to-study-in-australia-if-not-allowed-to-return-by-second-semester>

Appendix A: Report from a teacher in a major AMEP provider

*Just as this submission was being finalised,
ACTA received the following report from a major AMEP provider.*

We have been delivering this term using Blackboard Collaborate using booklets that were prepared in the final two weeks last term when we went into lockdown.

Students with technical capacity are encouraged to join classes by virtual participation (VP) which is offered hour for hour equivalent to the time they spent in face to face classes last term.

However, those who don't have the technical capacity or the digital literacy can work using the booklets and have a phone conversation with their teacher for 20% of the time previously spent in a full time class. This is called mixed mode (MM). It has been extremely difficult to accomplish for students with low oracy and /or low literacy.

We understood that we would be working in this way for all of term 2.

Yesterday I learned that these two modes are paid at different rates.

At the work group meeting yesterday we were also told the DHA has directed that all classes are to return to face to face delivery as soon as can be arranged.

If students do not or cannot return to face to face delivery we must refer them to Distance Learning (DL), the contract for which is currently held by TAFE NSW.

We would like to effect a transitional approach of some days face-to-face, some VP and or MM, building towards a face-to-face delivery for term 3 with a continued presence of VP / MM to provide flexible delivery for students when they are unable to attend class. Both teachers and students have found benefits and have continued to learn under these trying circumstances, especially those who may still be working and who attend evening classes, or part-time students with caring responsibilities or work.

The students who may not be able to return yet are those who may also be least likely to access DL.

Earlier this year we were told the DHA was encouraging us to innovate and develop materials to use online. Having done so, we are now not going to be able to continue using these materials with the students who most need it.

In the event of subsequent waves of the Covid19, we are ready to deploy rapidly as required from face-to-face to VP / MM and on a campus by campus basis if needed.

Community class students and Evening class students who have benefited from the contact maintained with teacher and classmates would lose this contact if they moved into DL. They may not be getting the locally specific information related to settlement from a national DL provider.

Due to the delay in ARMS [= the data management system] being available to track attendance for VP / MM, we are unable to know accurately how many hours a student has used and whether they have used their AMEP 510 hour entitlement. It would make sense if all students could be rolled into AMEP Extend, but we were told we couldn't enrol any beyond May 1st (perhaps having reached our cap?), so some were exited without completing the expected 490 additional hours. Yesterday I heard

that we could begin enrolling for the 2020-2021 financial year on the expectation that our cap would be reset from July 1st. This seems to be an inequity for those who were exited at May 1st.

Would it be a possible way forward to offer AMEP Extend more widely as a way out of Covid19 while our borders remain closed to new immigrants? It would mean that students who don't yet have functional English can continue learning. A mass exodus of EAL teachers, knowledge, experience and professional expertise would then be avoided. When our borders reopen, we would have a workforce ready to adapt, as we have already shown we can in our rapid move from face-to-face teaching to teaching remotely by VP / MM during the Covid19 lockdown?

I look forward to the ACTA survey of our AMEP staff. The survey recently conducted by Lynda Wyse Associates did not really explore the costs/benefits to students, staff and other stakeholders. It did not ask how what we have learned can continue to be integrated into our future offerings and delivery in order to enable our students to be better fitted to adapt digitally for life during and beyond Covid19.

Appendix B:

ACTA proposal for a Quality Assurance based method of allocating contracts for English language provision for adult migrants

The award and monitoring of contracts for the AMEP and the SEE Program should be streamlined and modernised on risk-based, quality assurance principles as follows.

Overall provider performance should be assessed annually and rigorously by independent assessors on a 5-point performance ranking scale, viz.:

A = outstanding performance

B = good performance

C = satisfactory performance

D = somewhat unsatisfactory performance

E = unsatisfactory performance.

Providers scoring C or below more than once in any 3 year period should be asked to show cause as to why their contract should not be re-opened for tendering.

Providers who consistently score A or B should not be required to compete for new contracts until a new 10-12 year cycle.

New tenders for all provision should be called every 10-12 years.

Provider assessments should be undertaken by a completely independent, expert body (for example, NEAS) with no other role in AMEP provision. The assessment team should include at least one outside expert in TESOL and another in public administration. Assessments should include classroom observations and interviews with students, teachers and managers.

The provider assessment scale should be determined in relation to KPIs devised by the Commonwealth in collaboration with providers and independent external experts in public administration and English language teaching and assessment. A research project should be instigated to investigate and develop effective and viable KPIs for the next round of contracts.
