



Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Reform Announcement 28 August 2020

On Friday 28 August 2020 acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, [announced major reforms](#) that will be implemented to the AMEP.

Overview

Learning a new language is complex and takes time, with many variables affecting an individual's ability to become proficient in speaking and understanding English. The impact of these factors will vary depending on individual experience and circumstance. According to research, however, key factors for adults include the extent of formal schooling in a first/other language and linguistic distance from English.

The AMEP services approximately 50,000 clients each year and provides eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants with a legislated entitlement of 510 hours of free English language tuition. It also includes sub-programs, which offer extra hours to assist students with additional needs. Many AMEP clients have very low levels of English language skills, and humanitarian entrants may face additional challenges in learning English due to difficult pre-migration experiences.

The Government has announced a package of reform, including legislative changes to remove the 510 cap to provide unlimited hours of tuition and raise the AMEP eligibility threshold and exit point from functional English to vocational English. Time limits on enrolling, commencing and completing AMEP tuition (for those already in Australia as at 1 October 2020) will also be removed.

This is the most significant reform to the program in many years and is part of a range of measures the Government is implementing to support Australia's social cohesion. These changes mean that more migrants will be able to access free English tuition for longer and until they reach a higher level of proficiency.

The reforms to the AMEP are being led by the Commonwealth Coordinator-General for Migrant Services as part of her work to drive better settlement outcomes for refugees and migrants with a focus on employment, English language acquisition and community integration.

What are the key changes being made to the AMEP?

- Amending the *Immigration (Education) Act 1971*, in order to:
 - remove the cap that limits free English tuition to 510 hours;
 - raise the AMEP eligibility threshold (and exit point for the program) from functional (IELTS 4.5 or equivalent) to vocational (IELTS 5.5 or equivalent) English; and
 - remove the time limits on enrolling, commencing and completing AMEP tuition (for those already in Australia as at 1 October 2020).

What do these changes mean and when will they be implemented?

- These changes will mean that more migrants will be able to access free English tuition, for longer, and until they reach a higher level of proficiency. Legislative changes will be sought as soon as the legislative schedule permits

Why are the AMEP hours being uncapped?

- At the moment only 510 hours is provided to eligible migrants with a proportion able to access an additional 1090 hours.
- Research shows 510 hours is insufficient to reach functional English, and that for many people around 2000 hours may be required.
- Uncapping the number of hours of tuition available recognises that learning a new language is complex and takes time, based on many factors including age, prior education and linguistic distance from English. Not all migrants will learn English at the same rate.
- Recent decades have seen a marked increase in the number of speakers of linguistically distant languages migrating to Australia (such as Arabic and Mandarin speakers), however the settings for our migrant English program have not adapted to this change.

Why is the eligibility level being changed to vocational English?

- Current eligibility settings mean a migrant is no longer eligible for the AMEP once they reach the level of 'functional' English. A person with this level of English is generally considered to be able to take part in informal conversations and handle routine that is not linguistically demanding, however, this level of proficiency is insufficient for participation in Vocational Education and Training beyond the Certificate I/II level, and considered by many employers as too low for employment.
- Amending the eligibility level means migrants will be able to stay in the program until they reach a higher level of proficiency. It also means those who are currently ineligible because they have functional English will be able to enter (or re-enter) the program to raise their English proficiency.
- This change also recognises the shift in the employment landscape, with vastly fewer lower skilled jobs now available than in the post-war period when the AMEP was first introduced. While functional English may have been sufficient in years past, even lower-skilled jobs now require higher levels of English to manage the health and safety requirements of Australian workplaces.

Why are the timeframes for enrolment and completion of the AMEP being removed?

- Currently, eligible migrants have six months to enrol, 12 months to commence and five years to complete AMEP tuition. An exemption can be sought to these time limits.
- Current timeframes and the administrative extension process can act as a disincentive to participation, and disproportionately impact women caring for children (who may prioritise settling their children before engaging in English tuition).
- There are also cohorts who have been in Australia for many years, who for various reasons have not commenced (or have not completed) English tuition.

How is the AMEP going to be made more flexible?

- The removal of hour limits on tuition and timeframes for completion mean that AMEP students can continue with their English studies at a rate that suits them and their work/family commitments. Leaving the AMEP because of these commitments does not mean a person cannot return to language learning at a later date.
- Building on reforms seen through the COVID-19 response, the future state of the AMEP will include a greater use of technology, including harnessing online platforms that will enable AMEP study from home, either to replace or supplement classroom-based learning. This flexibility will afford students the opportunity to accelerate their language learning, or just to better fit English studies around their lifestyle.

Where can I find more information?

- Further details on AMEP are available [here](#) and more detail on the reforms are available [here](#).