

Standards-Based Quality Assurance: the ACTA proposal

The following five outcomes are largely under the control of those who administer and deliver the Program. Performance against these outcomes can be validly and reliably measured. These measurements can be used to evaluate providers' and the Government's delivery of the Program.

1. Adult migrant English language learners' participation in the AMEP

Participation can be measured over time and evaluated in relation to evidence-based benchmarks for various learner cohorts, taking account of key external variables, notably (un/)employment rates.

2. AMEP students' English language gains

English gains can be measured, tracked and evaluated against evidence-based benchmarks for various cohorts, taking account of entry levels (including age and previous education) and the time spent in the Program.

3. AMEP student satisfaction

Students' can be asked to evaluate their AMEP experience in relation to program quality, their personal goals and the overall national goals served by the AMEP. These evaluations can be consistently and routinely documented through a simple, well-designed and appropriately administered process, measured and tracked over time, and used to develop evidence-based benchmarks. They do not need to be expensive and could be administered in class.

4. AMEP provider quality

Individual provider quality can be assessed according to recognised standards for English language programs for adult migrants. Comprehensive AMEP standards were developed, published and used under previous contracts (NEAS, 2009). To measure provider quality, reports on providers' performance in relation to standards can be mapped onto an A–E scale.

5. The evidence base that supports AMEP policies, practices and evaluations

The AMEP should be supported by a robust evidence base that:

- provides benchmarks for Outcomes 1 – 4 above
- independently researches and documents the AMEP's contribution to national goals
- creates knowledge and feedback loops for continuous improvement.

See Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1: How AMEP outcomes can be operationalised and measured

<i>Outcomes</i>	<i>What should be measured?</i>	<i>What would count as success?</i>
1. Participation	The number of adult migrant English language learners (i.e., those with less than “vocational English”) who participate in the AMEP.	Achieving or exceeding evidence-based benchmarks for enrolments and retention rates based on (1) long-term AMEP data on enrolments & retentions, (2) benchmarks established for Outcome 2, ¹ and (3) extrinsic factors, notably labour market data. See Outcome 5.
2. English language gains	<p>1) English entry & exit levels of those who enrol and stay in the AMEP for at least, say, five weeks.</p> <p>2) Learner achievement of competencies in the AMEP curriculum (viz. the <i>EAL Framework</i>).</p>	Achieving or exceeding evidence-based benchmarks for learner gains in the national AMEP curriculum for different learner cohorts in relation to (1) their English entry levels (2) previous education (3) age (4) experience of torture & trauma, (5) mother tongue/first language, and other recognised factors that impact on language learning. See Outcome 5.
3. Student satisfaction	AMEP student responses to validly and consistently designed and administered survey questions about their AMEP experience in relation to national goals, personal confidence & quality of teaching.	High satisfaction levels in relation to personal confidence, AMEP quality and its contribution to national goals. See Outcome 5.
4. Program quality	Assessment of each provider’s performance on an A–E rating scale against a comprehensive, relevant and agreed set of program standards, for example, the NEAS 2009 <i>AMEP Manual Standards and Criteria for AMEP Providers</i> . ²	Providers performing at A or B level according to independent assessments of performance against these standards by experts in program delivery, including teaching English to adult speakers of other languages.
5. A robust and credible evidence base that supports the AMEP overall and Outcomes 1-4 in particular.	<p>The overall research base would not be measurable in any meaningful way, but specific research questions will include measurements that should be clearly valid and reliable.</p> <p>Measures of Outcomes 1–4 will be valid and reliable <i>if and only if</i> benchmarks are based on a robust evidence base.</p>	<p>The evidence base meets the following criteria:</p> <p>Sound evidence supports the benchmarks for Outcomes 1-4 and are consistently applied from one contract to the next.</p> <p>In-depth independent research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shows how learners’ AMEP experience promotes the national goals served by the AMEP • pursues both specific and more general questions about the AMEP, its existing and potential students, and the Program’s contribution to national goals. <p>The evidence base supporting the AMEP is transparent and accessible to examination in the public domain.</p>

¹ That is, retention benchmarks will vary according to the factors that determine rate and level of progress, which, in turn, relate to previous English proficiency and level of schooling.

² The NEAS AMEP Standards were developed following a recommendation from the Auditor General in 2001. They provide detailed specifications for the following 7 Standards: Premises, Professional & Administrative Staff, Educational Resources, Program Delivery, Support Services, Program Evaluation and Program Promotion.