

14 August 2015

Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham  
Assistant Minister for Education and Training  
PO Box 6100  
Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: [senator.birmingham@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.birmingham@aph.gov.au)

CC: [AMEPEvents@education.gov.au](mailto:AMEPEvents@education.gov.au)

Dear Assistant Minister

### **Adult Migrant English Program evaluation**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

FECCA wishes to address some issues raised in the AMEP Evaluation Report and recent community consultations on AMEP.

### **The scope, eligibility and delivery of AMEP and its sub-programmes and services**

English language proficiency is fundamentally linked to good settlement outcomes. Conversely, a lack of English language proficiency inhibits the opportunity for new immigrants and refugees to fully participate in Australian society. Improvements to the delivery of AMEP may serve to reduce the social exclusion experienced by new immigrants and refugees as a result of limited English language proficiency. Ensuring our English language settlement programs are operating as effectively as possible will provide long term economic benefits and savings to government by helping to facilitate the effective settlement of immigrants and enable them to participate productively in our economy and the broader community.

Given the importance of English language tuition in the settlement process, FECCA supports the extension of AMEP eligibility to include temporary humanitarian visa classes.

Community consultations conducted by FECCA have revealed that there is a need for a more practical, practice-oriented structure and AMEP content:

The contents of AMEP courses require better scrutiny as many participants would benefit from a more practice-oriented training rather than academic-oriented learning. Many participants also felt that these courses need to be trade specific as far as practically possible (FECCA 2014-15 *Multicultural Access and Equity Report*, 23).

FECCA has consistently received feedback from its constituency and stakeholders that the AMEP program lacks sufficient flexibility and funding to cater to the diverse needs of learners accessing the program. Migrants and refugees come to Australia with vast differences in their pre-migration experiences as well as levels of literacy, numeracy, education and English language proficiency. The current structure of the AMEP needs to be further tailored to give migrants and refugees the best possible opportunity to become proficient in English to subsequently allow for increased employment opportunities and effective settlement.

#### **Whether to mandate participation in English language tuition in any circumstances**

FECCA believes that English language tuition should be offered as an opportunity for individuals rather than a requirement. There are many circumstances which may lead individuals to delay involvement with AMEP. For many, securing employment and income to support their family will necessarily take priority over learning English. Caring responsibilities of children, older members of the family or family members with disabilities, can make it difficult to participate in English language tuition, particularly for women. FECCA supports the maintenance of the current five year period for individuals to take advantage of 510 hours of English language tuition under AMEP. We oppose the introduction of mandated participation in the program.

#### **Whether to introduce partial fee-for-service for some AMEP client groups to access all of some parts of the programme**

FECCA objects to the introduction of partial fee-for-service for some AMEP client groups. All Australians should be able to access Government services equitably. People who need English language tuition are likely to be on low or no incomes. Further, it is a program which is not susceptible to misuse as those who do not need English language tuition will not use it. AMEP is a fundamental settlement service is a pathway to broader participation in society, and thus FECCA supports its continuation as a free program for all migrants and refugees who need it.

FECCA would welcome the opportunity to work with you on this important issue. You can contact FECCA Director, Ms Gulnara Abbasova, on 02 6282 5755 or at [gulnara@fecca.org.au](mailto:gulnara@fecca.org.au).

Yours sincerely



Eugenia Grammatikakis  
Acting FECCA Chair