



TURNBULL GOVERNMENT ERODES MIGRANT ENGLISH ENTITLEMENT

Just as the Turnbull Government is trying to clean up the disastrous consequences of the flawed deregulation of Australia's vocational education market, it is moving to relax requirements that underpin the quality of adult English teaching programs for Australia's newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Last Friday (7 Oct) new Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) *Request for Tender* guidelines were quietly introduced that create two English 'streams': a *Pre-Employment Stream* and a 'lower track' *Social Stream* that allows **impossibly large 'conversation' English classes of up to 25 students to be taught by teachers without any specialist English teaching or even general teaching qualifications.**

ACTA President, Dr Michael Michell, said that new arrivals will now be offered a 'choice' between "pre-employment" and "social English/conversation" classes. But they won't be told that social English classes are too large for "conversing" - nor that their 'teachers' are unqualified and have no teaching experience. Nor will they be told that, because they are *required* to offer social English classes, providers have a financial incentive in filling these classes and steering certain clients into inflexible, inferior second-class English tuition.

"The new tender arrangements actually encourage employment of cheaper, unqualified graduates who think teaching 'social English' classes involves little more than chatting with students. It signals a return to a pre-professional era when the thinking was 'if you can speak English, you can teach it'.

"These social stream classes are clearly aimed at **the most vulnerable, including women with childcare responsibilities, older immigrants and younger refugees with limited or no previous formal education.** These learners require more, not less, expert teaching", Dr Michell said.

"Increased class sizes and employment of unqualified teachers in the new AMEP tender arrangements will be attractive to those competing for contracts and looking for every possible means of keeping their bids low. In this way, the new arrangements deliver significant cost savings to Government in its pursuit of 'efficiency' measures.

"Creation of a sub-standard, lower-cost English stream **can only increase student drop-out rates along with unused English tuition entitlements.** The best that can be expected from social English stream classes will be stigmatised speakers of 'broken' English with limited opportunities for social and employment participation. **In 2013-14, approximately 30,000 people enrolled in the AMEP, about 10,000 were refugees.**

"This quality downgrade completely ignores the findings of the Government's most recent review of the AMEP, its own service standards, and the concerns of national organisations involved in migrant and refugee resettlement and quality teaching.

"At the same time as the Turnbull Government is increasing Australia's refugee and migrant intake, its **short-sighted, covert, cost-cutting strategy is undermining a key program in Australia's successful resettlement and integration of newcomers.**

"As the Prime Minister recently boasted in Paris, Australia is recognised world-wide as a successful immigrant nation. Key to this success is that new arrivals with very little/no English can access quality English language programs. That's why the *Immigration (Education) Act 1971* gives **adults a legal entitlement to 510 hours tuition** in the AMEP.

Creation of an inferior social English stream **surreptitiously undermines this legal entitlement** and threatens the quality and effectiveness of the AMEP as a whole."

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