



**Title of Report:** Pathways to Employment and Training in Australia

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## **1. Identify and describe the training program.**

English Language Services (ELS) is part of Technical and Further Education in South Australia. It currently delivers the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) funded Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) throughout South Australia. The AMEP is funded to provide language tuition and settlement orientation to newly arrived adult immigrants and refugees whose English is below “Functional” (defined in the legislation as basic social proficiency in English assessed at International Second Language Proficiency Rating 2 on a 5-point scale).

The Settlement Language for Pathways to Employment / Training Program is funded by DIAC as part of the AMEP. It is designed for AMEP eligible clients who are relatively settled in Australia and are motivated to find work. Ideally clients move into the Pathways program as they near completion of their AMEP entitlement.

The ELS Pathways to Employment and Training program combines English language, workplace orientation, vocational training modules, and work experience placement. Key features of the program include the following:

- Decisions about vocational training to be offered are based on research into skills shortages and job opportunities. The program is negotiated with the trainers to ensure learners are trained in skill sets which are desirable to employers.
- Work experience placements are sought in positions/industries which have been identified as needing the skill sets provided by the training.
- Each learner has regular meetings with a “case manager” (for up to one hour per week) who will help prepare the learner for work experience, as well as provide support to help overcome any barriers to gaining and maintaining work.
- Weekly meetings are held among teachers, case managers, and the program manager to ensure that difficulties are dealt with. At these meetings the needs of clients are discussed, so that program staff are informed and have a consistent approach to client pastoral care.

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- Before being accepted into the program, applicants undergo a selection procedure which screens them for English language level, motivation, ability to undertake the program, any past history of injury, and work readiness. Learners identified as not being appropriate are counseled into other more appropriate learning arrangements.
- The classes are run to simulate a workplace context, and the teachers and trainers expect learners to behave as if they are at work in relation to their attendance, punctuality, teamwork, attitude, and presentation.
- Program objectives are made clear before the learner even applies and these are referred to regularly throughout the program.
- Staff members work towards developing independence and work readiness in the learners so that they take responsibility for their own behavior. This goal is particularly important for learners who have spent a long time in refugee camps.
- Support is provided after course completion to assist with job search. This aids in achieving good outcomes.

Currently one 200-hour course is offered over a ten-week period four times a year. The current program consists of the following:

- Weeks 1 – 7: English language development, work awareness, and orientation (120 hours)
- Weeks 2 – 6: Introductory vocational training, including Occupation Health and Safety, to develop entry level skills in a relevant area of demand in hotel cleaning, housekeeping, and food handling (30 hours)
- Weeks 8 – 9: Work experience placement relevant to the training undertaken (40 hours)
- Week 10: English language tuition, debriefing from placement, and job search (10 hours)
- Weeks 1 – 14: Up to 1 hour per week of one-to-one vocational counseling to prepare clients for work experience, organize a work experience placement, and provide job search support (including four weeks of support after the course)

The English language teachers are highly qualified and experienced, with a minimum of a Bachelors degree and a postgraduate TESOL qualification. Vocational counselors have additional qualifications in educational counseling. Vocational lecturers have a minimum qualification of Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, a nationally accredited certificate for trainers providing Vocational Education Training.



## **2. Describe the target audience (i.e., the trainees) for the training program.**

ELS currently serves newly arrived adults from up to 105 countries and 115 different language backgrounds. Many ELS clients are of working age and hope to join the workforce soon after arrival, yet they lack awareness of the relevant opportunities, training, processes, and legislation in Australia.

The major groups include skilled or business immigrants, overseas-born spouses of Australian citizens, and refugees from countries such as Congo, Bhutan, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Some of these participants have lived in refugee camps for their entire adult lives. Some clients are highly educated and have professional or business backgrounds, while the majority are from lower educational backgrounds. Some have literacy problems and a substantial number are non-literate in their first language.

Clients in the program are usually in their twenties to forties and come from a broad range of backgrounds in terms of qualifications, skills, work experience, and knowledge of the training and employment context in South Australia. In particular, the clients need knowledge and understanding of the processes for applying for jobs. (Many come from countries where jobs are gained purely through family, friends, and contacts.) They also need to know about the legislation which protects workers, including Occupational Health and Safety and the Vocational Education Training sector. Clients must also learn about the workplace culture, including employability and generic skills and the importance of these skills in Australia.

Other clients are the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, which funds the program and sets the Key Performance Indicators. Local employers who provide work experience placements regularly employ the trainees after completion of the program.

## **3. Describe the needs assessment procedures utilized to develop the program.**

In July 2008 the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) announced funding for a four-year pilot project to trial an employment-focused program as part of the AMEP. Then in early 2008, an ELS staff member undertook a study tour of the USA, Canada, and the UK to research programs and services which were effective in assisting immigrants and refugees in gaining sustainable employment. The research from the study tour informed both the structure and curriculum of the ELS Pathways to Employment program. Many of the best practices observed on the study tour were adopted or modified for inclusion in the ELS program.

The needs of the trainees, those of the paying client (DIAC), and those of local employers were considered in devising the original ELS program, selecting the vocational training components, and determining the course content. A range of strategies is used to ensure the program meets the needs of all its clients and is continuously improved. Research is conducted into job vacancies: Employers for potential work experience placements are targeted. In addition, discussions are held with representatives of industry



training boards, as well as with lecturers and managers and students at the completion of their work experience placements.

As part of the selection procedure, clients are required to complete an application form and attend an interview. At this point the interviewer makes notes about any particular needs the client may have. This information then informs the teachers of the program. Clients who are deemed unable to benefit from the program are encouraged to return to their general English class and re-apply for the Pathways program at a later date.

#### **4. Explain the English language training program's over-arching goals and specific objectives.**

The overall goal of the program is to prepare learners to successfully find and maintain employment. Objectives for achieving this goal are to ensure that learners

- have appropriate communication skills to interact successfully in the workplace (including workplace jargon, body language, casual conversation, vocabulary, and expressions specific to particular jobs);
- have knowledge of and skills in job search techniques;
- have an understanding of Occupational Health and Safety procedures – through training and through workplace visits;
- can follow basic instructions and can clarify instructions and requests;
- have entry-level skills for particular target jobs in hospitality;
- demonstrate work readiness and employability through being independent, solving problems, showing initiative, and being able to work in teams as well as independently;
- demonstrate an ability to find workplaces using phone directories, street directories, and timetables;
- have adequate computer skills to communicate in a workplace environment;
- are aware of work conditions and expectations of employers in Australia;
- know how to access support in the case of unfair work practices; and
- are aware of and prepared to undertake further training/education pathways.

#### **5. Describe the teaching methods and training procedures used in the program.**



Teaching methods and training procedures used in the Pathways program include a communicative, interactive language teaching approach. In class, teachers create a simulated work environment where appropriate time management, presentation, and behaviors are reinforced through sign-in time sheets and regular feedback to learners.

The learners are each assigned a vocational counselor who guides them in preparing for work experience, assists with personal barriers to employment, and provides assistance in job searching. In addition, everything learned in class is reinforced by the case managers on a one-to-one basis and all staff members are aware of what is happening in other aspects of the program so there is consistency for the learners in their learning experience.

Vocational training in two targeted skill areas is delivered through a practical hands-on approach with theory taught in context. Currently housekeeping training is conducted in a five- star hotel and food handling training is conducted in commercial training kitchens. Work experience placement in targeted areas is linked to the training undertaken. Then debriefing of the work experience is used to assist learners in processing the experience.

The program also includes visits to workplaces where learners focus on workplace safety, duties, and processes. Guest speakers present up-to-date information on work-related topics. There is also independent learning time where learners must work alone to perform tasks and group work tasks, both with minimal teacher supervision.

Student presentations and interviews with learners are videotaped, providing learners with the opportunity to critique themselves and each other. In addition, feedback is provided about posture, eye contact, body language, speaking more clearly, and confidence, as well as the language used. Furthermore, casual conversation with native speakers is included by combining the class with a volunteer tutor training class for an hour of conversation practice. Possible vocational training pathways for learners completing the program are identified and application processes are explained to the learners.

## **6. Describe the teaching materials used in the program.**

Teachers in the program have developed teaching resources over time. These materials are modified each term and take the form of booklets on specific topics which are delivered concurrently (usually three topics at a time). This approach provides both variety and repetition. The materials are structured to complement and build on the skills, and cross reference each other. Here are the topics of the booklets:

1. **Finding Your Way** – map reading, street and phone directories (including internet-based resources).
2. **Work Skills** – employability skills, skills and duties, transferrable skills.
3. **Casual Conversation & Communication at Work** – taboo topics, swearing, casual conversation in the workplace, the language of instruction, making polite requests, softening language, and asking for repetition and clarification.



4. **Interview skills** – successful interviews, interview structure, listening to questions and preparing answers, building appropriate skills, personal presentation and time management, researching the company, writing and learning a “script” for an interview, and practicing it to develop coherence.
5. **Computer Assisted Learning** – using language learning software to reinforce workplace communication, including vocabulary used in training; using internet sites to research public transport, job guides, jobs related to the vocational training undertaken, job vacancies, and targeted companies; using email and attachments; Occupational Health & Safety training online with a quiz and certificate.
6. **Occupational Health & Safety** – learning about hazards in the workplace; responsibilities of employers and employees; manual handling; safe work practices for training areas, including common injuries in these industries, and strategies to avoid injury; dealing with accidents at work (report forms, scenarios for workplace injuries, writing accident or incident reports, and emergency procedures); and understanding the concepts of basic first aid.
7. **Looking for a Job** – networking, newspaper advertisements (and job ad abbreviations), developing telephone skills, preparing a “script,” leaving a message, and cold canvassing by phone.
8. **Starting a New Job** – superannuation, taxation and tax rates, unions, awards, getting paid, getting pay slips, different modes of employment, leave entitlements, wages, cash economy, reading rosters, Equal Opportunity, Fair Work Ombudsman, and handling problems in the workplace.

Additional resources used include graphic-rich vocational training booklets covering vocabulary, processes, and the language of instruction for that skill area; DVDs demonstrating interview skills; workplace visits for raising safety awareness and work processes; and relevant internet sites. Materials also include realia, such as brochures on workers’ rights.

**7. Explain the content of the English language training program.**

<b>A Written and Spoken Genres</b>	<b>B. Communicative Functions</b>	<b>C. Speech Events</b>
Job search documents (resumes, application letters, application forms) Job Interviews Casual conversation Language of instruction Training booklets Incident or accident reports	Talking about previous jobs Reading procedures Negotiating Clarifying Understanding oral and written instructions Answering interview questions	Oral presentations (e.g., about country of origin) Job interviews Explaining procedures Giving directions to tourism sites or restaurants Taking menu orders



Writing emails	Responding to requests Greeting and leave-taking Polite requests	
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**8. Explain the delivery mechanisms employed by the program.**

Delivery is predominantly classroom-based (130 hours total), but includes some computer-assisted language learning (one hour per week in a computer suite). Practical skills training (thirty hours in a workshop environment) and work experience placement (forty hours total) make up the remainder of the program. Independent learning tasks (approximately twenty hours) are undertaken by learners as homework activities.

The program was planned to ensure all course elements were cohesive. For example, a weekly plan was developed to map the classroom components with the tasks carried out by the case managers each week. In addition, the employability skills were mapped against the program to ensure consistent development of work readiness. Furthermore, language learning outcomes were mapped against the course content to ensure learners were working towards completion of the required learning outcomes from the Certificate in Spoken and Written English, the nationally accredited certificate used in all Adult Migrant Education Program classes throughout Australia.

**9. Explain the assessment procedures used in the program.**

In terms of formal assessment, learners work towards completion of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English. They also work towards successful completion of food handling or housekeeping modules from Certificate 2 in Hospitality Studies, a nationally accredited certificate providing qualifications for entry level employment in the hospitality industry. The hospitality modules and the speaking and writing modules are compared to each other and assessment tasks are developed to assess learning outcomes from both certificates concurrently. While undertaking work experience placements, the learners are assessed against the following workplace-related modules: *Workplace Communication* and *Structured Workplace Learning*.

English language assessments are based on tasks involving oral presentations, casual conversations, incident or accident reports, interview skills, recounts, following instructions, and developing learning plans.

The following informal methods are used to check the learners' progress: self-assessments through completion of checklists; weekly practical assessments of skills training; trainer feedback on performance; and performance on interview tasks (self-, peer- and teacher-assessed). There are also observations of behavior by teachers and case managers to ascertain work readiness, as well as feedback from a workplace supervisor.

**10. Explain the program evaluation mechanisms used.**



Weekly staff meetings are scheduled, with time allocated for discussing and recording concerns and successes. Staff members discuss each area of the program and the progress of each participant in the program. The program manager regularly attends meetings to check that problems are dealt with and strategies are put in place to ensure processes are constantly improved.

Evaluation methods include analysis of the effectiveness of the publicity and selection procedures in selecting appropriate clients for success; the course delivery, syllabus and resources for effectiveness. The evaluation also focuses on the vocational training and resources used in preparing learners for work experience placements and entry-level jobs. It also addresses the case management strategies used to prepare the learners effectively for employment, as well as the work experience placements in preparing learners for the realities of the workplace.

Evaluation resources include informal oral evaluation by the learners on a weekly basis, including debriefs following vocational training. We also use phone surveys of employers in the first week of placement and formal evaluation sheets for employers involved in the work experience placements.

There are formal evaluation surveys for learners at the conclusion of the course, as well as end-of-course discussions between the staff and manager responsible for evaluating all aspects of the program, including the vocational training program, selection of modules, content, assessment methods, resources used, and staff. After the training, we conduct ongoing telephone surveys with employers who have employed learners from the course, and also ongoing telephone and face-to-face surveys with learners who have completed the course.

The outcomes of this evaluation have been improvement in the achievement of Key Performance Indicators, through maintenance of those aspects of the program which are considered appropriate. We also change or improve those aspects of the program which are considered inappropriate or lacking in some way.

The staff has also worked to predict the labor demands in the near future, based on skills shortages, labor market trends, and seasonal factors. Subsequent steps include two foci: (1) determining the best vocational training option to enhance the learners' prospects of gaining employment or being accepted into further training, and (2) determining the best work experience options to enhance the learners' prospects of gaining employment or being accepted into further training.

Successful employment outcomes and employer feedback reflect the success of this approach to ongoing evaluation and continual improvement. The program currently has a strong reputation with five-star hotels in the area, which ultimately has ensured a steady offer of work experience placements, since employers have used the placement to appraise the learners and consider them for ongoing employment as well as induct them into the processes of the enterprise.





**11. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this English training program.**

A high proportion of refugees access the program, many of whom have been in refugee camps for most of their lives and most likely all of their adult lives. They generally have low levels of education and have had few work opportunities in the past, so the course is very beneficial. Conveying the concepts relating to workplace culture is particularly difficult with learners who have little or no experience of work. Some of them struggle with settlement issues due to past trauma or ongoing concerns, such as tracing family members. Others are trying to assist family in reuniting or supporting their family members overseas.

As a result, ten weeks is usually not long enough to develop work readiness in these students. Unfortunately, employers provide feedback on some refugee trainees that while they are willing and punctual, they can be rather slow in fulfilling their duties.

To start a job, learners need to have organized a police check, a Tax File number, a bank account, and two emergency contact people. Trainees need to provide this information to the employer in writing. If selected, they need to be able to select a superannuation fund. They must also be able to read, understand, and sign a statement that they will abide by the company's policies and practices. (One employer had a 65-page induction handbook.) Employees are often required to complete and pass sophisticated Occupational Health and Safety courses online before they can start. While general information can be covered in the course, the students require considerable individual help through case management in order to understand and manage these processes.

Recently there has been an increase of male students in the program, which is disproportional to the typical gender balance in the AMEP. It is interesting that many of the male students have opted for hotel cleaning, even though that part of the hospitality industry is dominated by women. Unfortunately, this situation has meant it has been harder to place the men because most employers prefer female staff. It has also meant that it has been harder for these men to find employment.

More and more of the hotels where Pathways clients have been placed for work experience have changed their employment practices and this fact has had some impact on both work experience placements and employment outcomes. Rather than employing housekeeping staff directly, some hotels are outsourcing the cleaning to large cleaning companies, who in turn recruit their own staff under reduced working conditions.

Some other large hotels are engaging cleaners as self-employed sub-contractors. To work as a sub-contractor the cleaner must have an Australian Business Number in order to operate a small business, buy uniforms from the hotel, and pay for the cost of the chemicals used. For our clients, working under these conditions is particularly fraught because they have to manage payment of their own taxation.

**12. Describe the successes of the program and explain how they are documented.**



The DIAC Key Performance Indicators of 50% job outcomes, 35% vocational training outcomes, and no more than 15% attrition set at the beginning of the funding period were difficult to achieve. (The Key Performance Indicators have recently been modified to a more achievable 20% employment outcomes, 60% vocational training outcomes, and 20% attrition.) The ELS program has consistently achieved 40% to 45% employment outcomes.

The hotel cleaning training option has been very successful in moving learners into employment, although this area also has difficulties (see 11 above). The staff has established excellent relationships with major hotels in the city and placing learners (especially females) in work experience has become easier. Some of our ex-students are now supervisors in the hotels and play a role in inducting current students. Other students have reported that they have the confidence and skills to apply for higher level jobs. It is heartening to see that the learners are not remaining in low level jobs indefinitely.

Employability skills development in the learner is critical to the success of the program. It is also essential to the success of the individual students, who are more effective in the workplace as a result of working cooperatively as well as independently in the program.

Attendance and punctuality of the learners in the Pathways program is much better than in regular AMEP classes, and attrition rates are minimal. While this is partly due to the selection procedures used, it is also a testament to the dedication of the staff members, the hard work of the learners, the tightness of the program, and the evaluation and continuous improvement strategies that have been put in place.

It is hard to measure the value of new arrivals gaining their first jobs in Australia (and sometimes their first jobs ever). For the funding client (the federal government), their employment means a cost saving in payment of welfare benefits and income through taxation as a result of learners' participation in the workforce. Employers who provide program-based work experience for learners have the opportunity to assess the suitability of those learners for potential employment. If those employers do provide employment for trainees, they gain workers who have been trained to a high standard.

The impact on the life of the immigrant or refugee of gaining a job and participating in the workforce is huge. It means the beginning of participating in Australian society on an equal footing with other workers, the opportunity to support family in Australia and overseas, and the ability to begin to provide for family rather than receiving government handouts. Successful completion of the program offers participants the opportunity to improve their lives in Australia.