



Review of languages education policies in Australia

Report commissioned by
the Multicultural Education and Languages Committee (MELC)

Prepared by: Dr Michelle Kohler
Flinders University

February 2017



Government of
South Australia

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1. Introduction

This paper was commissioned by the Multicultural Education and Languages Committee to inform the work of that committee in advising the South Australian Minister for Education and Child Development on languages education policy.

The purpose of the paper is to review the current state of languages education policy across Australia, noting that there is currently no national language education policy at the federal level. The paper therefore focuses on the nature of each of the state and territory policies and the general picture that emerges. This snapshot will then be considered in the context of languages education in South Australia. A broad sweep of the policies rather than a comprehensive analysis it is intended to determine directions and implications that may inform work in languages education in South Australia.

2. Methodology

The methodology used to develop this paper was principally document analysis. The key publicly available documents related to languages education in each state and territory formed the basis of the analysis. Where there were available, current policies specifically for languages education were used. Where they were none, more general policy or curriculum documents were used. In a small number of cases, the policy situation is in flux (eg the Australian Capital Territory), hence the existing policy documents are no longer relevant to this task. In that case, publicly available documents were insufficient and the data were supplemented with personal communication with those currently leading the policy redevelopment process. The policies typically relate to the compulsory years of schooling, with senior secondary years being governed by post-compulsory certificates managed in a number of cases by independent statutory authorities. The focus in this paper is primarily on the compulsory years of schooling, however, some brief comments are also made on the senior secondary years.

After the relevant documents were gathered, they were analysed according to:

- policy title
- stated purpose/aims
- requirements, eg compulsion/choice
- targets
- structures
- strategies

- curriculum, teaching and learning
- accountability, monitoring and evaluation.

The analysis was carried out on an individual state/territory basis and the key features and issues across the set of documents were developed. Finally, the common themes were developed and considered in terms of possible implications for the South Australian context.

3. Discussion of state and territory policies

This section presents the analysis of individual state and territory policy documents related to languages education. The discussion is presented through a brief outline of the policy/ies (or plan/s) and the key features, followed by an analysis of any significant issues and/or implications.

3.1 Australian Capital Territory

The ACT currently has a specific language policy, the Many Voices 2012–2016: Australian Capital Territory Languages policy (Australian Capital Territory Community Services Directorate, nd). Its stated aims (in brief) are:

- access to high quality language learning opportunities and ... enhance[d] access, choice and continuity of language programs in [public and community sectors]
- sustainable language programs that are underpinned by the ready supply and retention of quality language teachers
- work closely with the ACT Community Language Schools Association Inc to develop community understanding of languages education... and development of positive attitudes towards languages education among students, families, teachers, community groups and education leaders in the ACT. (5.8–5.10)

The key thrust of the policy therefore has been access and availability of programs, supply and retention of teachers and improved understandings of languages education in the broader community.

In addition to the specific policy related to languages, there are curriculum guidelines in the form of the 2009 document Curriculum Requirements in ACT Public Schools, Preschool to Year 10. This document outlines the implementation timeline of the Australian Curriculum in the ACT, with the current focus being on implementation during 2016 and moving towards all school reporting using the Australian Curriculum by the end of 2017. The languages learning area resides within the third phase of subjects to be implemented, after civics and citizenship. This document also stipulates a





minimum requirement for language learning of 60 minutes a week for years 3–6 and 150 minutes a week for years 7–8.

As the existing policy is nearing the end of its life, work is underway to develop a new policy. The Community Services Directorate of the Australian Capital Territory Government (which has responsibility for Multicultural Affairs) has conducted a consultation process in which all areas of the government were asked to report actions and suggest ideas for a new policy for the following areas:

- English as the national language
- language services
- learning other languages
- languages and economic benefit
- Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages.

Two community consultations were also held to invite input from the language teaching and learning community and multicultural organisations in the ACT. These consultations informed the development of recommendations to the Australian Capital Territory Government about what is needed in the new policy.

The consultation feedback reveals well-known key issues raised by language teachers (Scott, 2016). It is unclear at this stage what the nature of the policy will be, however there seems to be keen interest among government departments and the broader community in a more targeted policy with specific goals and explicit monitoring and evaluation requirements that increase accountability for achieving the stated goals.

At the senior secondary level, the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) is currently undertaking a review of languages, focusing on 3 key areas: the number and level of language courses, eligibility criteria, and assessment. The current certificate has no requirement to study a language at the senior secondary level. Three levels of syllabus are available in 8 languages (Beginners, Continuers and Advanced) and Latin is also offered. The 'recommended content' in the current Course Framework (BSSS 2013, p6) comprises 4 topics (the individual's experience; society and community; the world around us; and lifestyles and traditions) and the assessment is framed around 3 skills: speaking and writing (communicating), and responding (understanding). The University of Canberra and the Australian National University both offer bonus points schemes of up to 5 points for students who study a language other than English to Year 12.

3.2 New South Wales

Over a 4-year period, the New South Wales Board of Studies Teaching & Educational Standards (BOSTES NSW) redeveloped its current policy for languages education, Learning Through Languages: Proposals (BOSTES NSW, 2013). The development process commenced in 2012 following a request by the then Minister for Education for the Board of Studies to review the state of languages education in New South Wales. There followed a period of consultation with stakeholders, a stocktake of current provision, and a review of ‘best’ practice nationally and internationally. A reference paper and consultation papers were developed and a more widespread consultation was held over a 3-month period. A final consultation report was endorsed by BOSTES prior to approval of a set of recommendations by the New South Wales Schools Advisory Council and the Minister for Education in 2014. The “proposed actions” are considered to “incorporate the development of a language education policy” (BOSTES 2016).

The policy aims to achieve broader and more inclusive languages education for NSW students. There are 6 proposals that aim to achieve the goal of long-term, developmental and sustainable languages education. The key actions in these proposals are:

- Establish a New South Wales languages advisory panel to oversee the strategic coordination of initiatives
- Develop a new curriculum framework, organised according to 2 strands:
 - Language awareness
 - Language learning
- Increase immersion/bilingual programs
- Advocate for language methodology training for bilingual pre-service students
- Increase access to and address barriers at senior secondary level (including blended learning and changing perceived eligibility and Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR] score disadvantages)
- Develop a languages passport (that indicates proficiency level).

In terms of program types, primary schools can choose to offer programs oriented towards strand 1 (language awareness, how to learn a language, and intercultural understanding) or strand 2 (learning a language), however, middle secondary levels are required to integrate both strands. Primary schools that choose to offer the language learning strand of the curriculum framework have access





to online curriculum materials. The Board will also make available non-continuous modules to support various entry and exit points, and will develop content and language integrated learning (CLIL)–oriented materials.

The policy is oriented towards encouraging participation and increasing retention through removal of perceived barriers. The document indicates that there is no appetite for compulsion given the perceptions of language learning relevance in the community. The current policy “encourages” language learning in primary school. It continues the mandated requirement of earlier policies of 100 hours of language learning in 1 language in either Year 7 or Year 8, and within a 1-year period. The panel will consider a medium-term objective of requiring language study in primary schools and is currently encouraging schools to introduce community language programs. There is a focus on drawing on the existing bilingual capacity within the community and of bilingual pre-service education students, particularly in primary education degrees.

The New South Wales BOSTES oversees the senior secondary High School Certificate, for which around 10% of all students study a language from the 63 languages that are offered. A range of syllabus levels are available (beginners, continuers, extension, heritage, background speakers), however, not all levels are provided for all languages. Although the introduction of a heritage-level syllabus in some languages has to some extent alleviated concerns about the limitations of previous syllabuses to cater for the range of students, concerns about eligibility and scaling remain and this is an ongoing area for improvement. The syllabuses for small-candidature languages follow the design of the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages (CCAFL) around 4 objectives and 3 prescribed themes: the individual; the [language] speaking communities; and the changing world. Bonus point schemes operate in the university sector on an automatic basis in some cases and on a course-related basis in others. There is a marked discrepancy in the geographical distribution of students learning a language at senior secondary, with students in urban areas 4 times more likely to study a language than their rural counterparts (BOSTES 2013:14).

3.3 Northern Territory

A new policy, *Changing the Conversation: A Blueprint for Languages Education in Northern Territory Schools*, was released in 2015 by the Northern Territory Board of Studies (NTBOS). During that year, a discussion paper was developed and consultation with stakeholders took place. The policy was developed and implemented during 2016, with 2017 being a year of monitoring and consolidation before a review in 2018. The stated goal of the policy is to provide a “long-term vision for building the capacity of our sector leaders, school leaders and classroom educators, ... emphasis[ing] the essential measures for tracking the success of languages education by offering strategic actions to guide the work that needs to take place at all levels of education” (NTBOS, 2015, p4) .It should also be noted that the blueprint supports Asian languages (Indonesian, Japanese, Mandarin) and states that the NTBOS will work with stakeholders during 2016 to develop a policy “specifically to grow the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages” (p11).

Framed as a blueprint rather than a policy, the document is organised through a matrix of principles, strategies, indicators and milestones. The strategies are divided further according to 2 key sets of responsibilities, those for the sector and those for schools. Table 1 indicates the relationship between the 2 key aspects of the blueprint.

Table 1: The relationship between principles and strategies

Principles	Strategies
1: Quality languages learning	1: Expert teams
	2: Effective practices
2: Continuity of languages learning	3: Coordinated partnerships
	4: A culture that promotes languages learning
3: Provision of languages programs	5: Systematic curriculum delivery
	6. Differentiated provision
	7. Improvement agenda
4: Sustainability of languages resources	8. Planned use of resources
	9. Collection and analysis of data





Each strategy is differentiated further according to indicators of achievement and milestones for both sector leaders and schools.

The strategies focus on familiar areas such as recruitment and retention of quality teachers of languages, support for in-service professional learning, school partnerships for shared provision, curriculum support materials and so on. What is notable is the substantial emphasis, indeed a high priority on system-wide gathering, analysis and use of data (beyond participation data) to inform the monitoring and evaluation of the blueprint. In fact, the data to be collected will include students' perceptions, progress, achievement and participation rates. There is also a substantial emphasis on communicating requirements to schools and the community, and making explicit plans and accountability requirements of schools and sector leaders for achievement of the strategies.

Indeed, the document's title indicates an attempt to be innovative and offer a renewed vision by "changing the conversation" in a number of areas:

- from provision only to quality and continuity
- from numbers of students enrolled or achieving the standard, to selective use of qualitative and quantitative data to inform understandings of the impact of languages education
- from staffing to a focus on achievable strategies and milestones that reflect a sustainable effort and impact.
- from externally to internally driven change at all levels. (adapted from NTBOS 2015, p11)

Although the document attempts to reframe understandings and make accountabilities more explicit through features such as indicators and milestones, they remain vague and difficult to evaluate in terms of their achievement. For example, "strategy 7: improvement agenda" includes the strategy for sector leaders that "explicit and sector-wide targets for improvements in languages provision and timelines [will] have been set and communicated to schools." (NTBOS 2015, p.21) The indicators of success for this strategy are outlined as "communicating consistent expectations for improvements in student perceptions, progress, achievement and participation in languages programs as part of school review processes" (p.21). There is no indication within the blueprint as to what "consistent expectations" are and what would be an acceptable level of improvement.

Furthermore, in terms of curriculum expectations (and therefore program conditions) the document indicates that teachers need to modify the Australian Curriculum for use in their classes as the assumed time on task for writing does not meet current provision in schools. Hence, rather than

schools increasing the conditions of provision to match those assumed by the curriculum writers, teachers are required to change the content. This indicates that the status quo for time on task will likely remain.

The NTBOS has responsibility for the Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET), for which students must gain 200 credits from a range of compulsory (Personal Learning Plan, English, Mathematics) and non-compulsory subjects (including languages). The languages subjects available to students are provided by the SACE Board of South Australia. These subjects attract 2–4 bonus points for entrance into Charles Darwin University (and the 3 South Australian universities that follow the scheme administered by the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre, SATAC).

3.4 Queensland

In 2014, the Queensland Education Minister announced that under a new language education policy, Languages in Queensland State Schools (Department of Education and Training [DET] 2016b), it would be mandatory from 2015 for state school students in years 5 to 8 to learn a language. Furthermore, he indicated that under the Global Schools through Languages plan (DET 2016a), by 2025 all state primary schools would offer a languages program from prep onwards. The plan has 3 aims:

- expand the study of languages from Prep to Year 12 with a focus on Asian languages
- build the intercultural capability of students, teachers and school leaders
- market Queensland’s education sector internationally. (Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 1)

Together, the new policies mark a shift away from the previous policy, under which only those students in years 6–8 were required to learn a language. Schools were “strongly encouraged” (Langbroek, 2014) to offer a languages program from prep to year 12, however, the provision of languages is now required in years 5–8.

These policies intersect with the implementation of the Australian Curriculum; schools are currently implementing the Australian Curriculum: Languages. Although time allocations for all other learning areas are defined by the Department of Education and Training, languages time allocations are defined by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) and follow the same times as the Australian Curriculum. The respective times are shown in Table 2.





Table 2: Time allocations for languages in Queensland state schools

Year level/s	Time allocated (minimum)
Prep–Year 6	46 hours/year if 37 teaching weeks 50 hours/year if 40 teaching weeks (1.25 hrs/week, 85 mins/week)
Year 7–9	74 hours/year if 37 teaching weeks 80 hours/year if 40 teaching weeks (2 hrs/week, 120 mins/week)
Year 10	70 hours/year if 35 teaching weeks 76 hours/year if 38 teaching weeks (2 hrs/week, 120 mins/week)

A number of strategies are already underway to support the new policy, including a major curriculum development initiative to prepare teaching materials in 6 languages for years 5 to 10. The materials for French and Japanese have been made freely available to state schools and it is anticipated that all languages will be made available online, including some from prep to year 5 by the end of 2017.

There are plans for scholarships for students to participate in vacation programs offered in conjunction with universities, a high achiever in-country study pilot program and a native-speaker assistant program. A further initiative that began in 2014 was the first primary Japanese bilingual program, with 75 year 1 students at Wellers Hill State School. The [Department of Education and Training](#) also recently commissioned research to explore the possibilities of delivering language programs through technology.

The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority offers 11 languages plus Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, which can be studied at the senior secondary level. The Authority is prevented by legislation from providing differentiated syllabuses based on language proficiency, background or heritage, hence syllabuses are designed for second language learners, who are assumed to have commenced studying the language in the compulsory years. The QCAA’s move towards a combined internal and external assessment-based senior secondary certificate has resulted in a major redevelopment of language subjects to include 75% internal and 25% external assessment. A number of languages (Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish) are in various stages of redevelopment, with another tranche of language subjects about to undergo redevelopment. Currently, the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) applies 2 bonus points for language study towards a student’s Overall Position (OP) and QTAC Selection Rank.

3.5 South Australia

Since 2011, South Australia has not had a specific policy or plan for languages education. Currently, languages education is governed by the umbrella curriculum policy document (for all learning areas), the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) Australian Curriculum Policy and Guidelines (2013). This document sets out the timeline and expectations for implementation and reporting using the Australian Curriculum. It states that all learning areas will be fully implemented by the end of 2016. For languages, this means that all students from foundation to year 8 will be learning a language other than English.

The overriding policy for languages education, therefore, is a curriculum policy based on the requirement to implement the Australian Curriculum. This means using the time on task assumed in writing the curriculum as the recommended time allocation for offering learning areas and subjects in schools. For languages, this means that foundation to year 7 are allocated 80 minutes a week, whereas years 8–10 are allocated 128 minutes a week (noting also that languages become optional after year 8). As the previous languages policy provided for 90 minutes a week in primary and 150 minutes a week in junior secondary, this requirement is in some cases a decrease and in other cases an increase in provision. Schools are able to claim exceptional circumstances for not complying with this requirement if principals outline their plans for achieving implementation within a clear timeframe.

Most recently, the DECD announced new bilingual programs from reception (R) to year 12. Commencing in 2017, it offers an R–12 Chinese program and an R–7 and 8–12 French program. Other strategies currently include a partnership model for primary language program provision offered through the Open Access College. This program has expanded substantially in the last 2 years, with many schools opting to provide a language program through a distance delivery model (1 lesson a week) with the support of classroom teachers at the school site.

Within the senior secondary context, the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) provides syllabuses for 36 languages plus Auslan, Australian Languages, and the subject Language and Culture. A range of languages have differentiated syllabuses (beginners, continuers, background speakers), some of which are offered through CCAFL and follow the same design as those in New South Wales and Victoria. Through the SATAC Universities Language, Literacy and Mathematics Bonus Scheme, students can be awarded 2–4 bonus points for completing a Stage 2 (year 12) language subject.





3.6 Tasmania

There is currently no specific policy for languages education in Tasmania. Language learning has fallen under the broader Tasmanian Multicultural Policy 2014 and until the end of 2015 was part of the Tasmanian Department of Education's strategy, Engaging with Asia Strategy 2013–2015 and the whole-of-government policy, Tasmania's place in the Asian century. The multicultural policy has a broad agenda to focus on supporting linguistic diversity within the Tasmanian community, such as provision of language services and access to English language programs for migrant community members. The policy is framed in terms of catering for linguistic diversity in order to *enable* an inclusive, anti-discriminatory and socially cohesive society. It is silent on language learning as related to multiculturalism beyond migrant communities.

Tasmanian schools are required to implement and report on the following areas of the Australian Curriculum: English, mathematics, science, history, geography (P–8), health and physical education (P–10), arts, and technology. Further to this, schools are “strongly encouraged” to offer languages (ie LOTE) (Tasmanian Government, 2016, p4). A number of syllabuses and support materials for K–10 are available in 6 languages (3 Asian, 3 European).

At the senior secondary level, all Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) language courses were rewritten during 2013 and implemented in 2014 and a University College Program (UCP) offers extension courses for learners in French or Japanese. According to the annual report (TASC, 2015), enrolments in languages increased across Department of Education schools in 2015. This is interesting, as there is no requirement to study a language in the P–10 years. Two bonus points are offered by the University of Tasmania for students who have successfully studied a language at year 12 level.

3.7 Victoria

Victoria has the most elaborated and well-resourced language education policy of any state or territory. The specific policy, *“Languages – expanding your world: A plan to implement the Victorian Government’s vision for languages education 2013–2025”* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2013) sets out a long-term agenda and resourcing plan for the state education system. As a condition of registration, schools are required by legislation, the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic), to provide instruction in 8 learning areas, including in languages. Further to this, the languages education policy is complemented by *“Internationalising schooling: A how-to-guide for schools”*, which states that a “globally ready student ... speaks two or more languages” and is “competent in diverse settings and can engage with different beliefs and cultures in meaningful and purposeful ways” (p4).

The policy outlines 3 key aims with a number of associated strategies to realise them, as outlined in Table 3:

Table 3: Aims and associated strategies (selected)

Aim	Strategies (examples)
Building demand	\$1m start-up grants for new language programs in schools
	Language ambassadors to promote benefits
Developing and expanding the workforce	\$6m program to increase number of qualified teachers (210 scholarships over 3 years)
	400 teacher exchanges and support for language assistants
Strengthening delivery, resources and partnerships	Clusters, shared resources and delivery through technology
	\$13m for 1500 students to study in China

The key feature of this policy as distinct from others is the inclusion of specific targets:

- By 2015, 100% of government schools providing a Foundation (Prep) level languages program





- By 2025, 100% of government schools providing a languages program and awarding the new Certificate of Language Proficiency at Year 10
- By 2025, 25% of all students in government and non-government schools include a language in addition to English in their senior secondary program of study (DEECD, 2013, p5)

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on measuring gains in language learning (understood as proficiency), with specific proficiency targets for end-of-phase learners, for example “By 2025, 60% of year 6 and 40% of year 10 students will be achieving the required proficiency” (DEECD, 2013, p5), as measured by an online proficiency assessment tool.

In terms of program conditions and time on task, primary school programs are required to provide a minimum of 150 minutes a week, spread as evenly as possible across the week. Schools that are unable to do so are required to outline in their strategic plan how the school intends to increase the time allocation to that specified (and assumed sufficient to meet the relevant proficiency level). The curriculum for foundation to year 10 is known as the AusVELS and this is a local adaptation of the Australian Curriculum.

In addition to the strategies listed in Table 3, various others are already underway, including:

- a workforce planning group that includes the tertiary sector
- the Languages Passport (that starts from young learners and travels with students)
- the Certificate of Language Proficiency (from 2014) for year 10 students
- a language assistant program
- in-country scholarships (\$13m for Chinese)
- bilingual and CLIL program support and professional learning
- a languages and school experience program in conjunction with the tertiary sector
- the Certificate in Community Language Teaching.

The policy also includes plans for the following:

- a Leading Languages course for school leaders
- incentives for senior secondary students (including a Certificate III in Applied Language as a Victorian Certificate of Education [VCE] VET program)

- bilingual ATAR bonus for students who complete 2 first languages in the VCE (Mandarin/English initially)
- expansion of the bonus points system
- provision of an online Chinese (Mandarin) course to year 8, available to all schools.

Victoria's policy continues direct funding of community languages schools, the Victorian School of Languages (offering 40 languages face-to-face and 10 via distance learning), and the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre, which provides resources in 40 different languages.

At the senior secondary level, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) offers 45 languages including some with a number of syllabus levels (first language, second language, second language advanced). The study design essentially follows the same framework as CCAFL, which is offered in New South Wales and South Australia. In 2014, the VCAA introduced the VCE (Baccalaureate) as a means of encouraging, and recognising the efforts involved in, the study of a language to Year 12. Bonus points (typically from 3 to 5) are also offered but are not automatically applied. Students must apply to individual institutions and at times specific courses, depending on the university requirements. Acceleration is increasingly common, with figures showing a growing trend (ie three-fold increase) in the number of students in year 10 studying a year 12 subject (Preiss, 2014). Students must study a minimum of 4 units (including a compulsory English subject) to complete the VCE, however, there is some recognition (10% of the subject score) for studying additional (ie 5th or 6th) subjects and this is potentially beneficial for increasing the enrolments in language subjects.

Overall, the Victorian Government's is the most comprehensive policy and plan for action to support language learning in Australia. It provides the strongest long-term plan with clear expectations, staged strategies and ongoing resourcing. There are attempts to measure the plan's impact through targets and proficiency testing, however, it is unclear how the testing relates to the Australian Curriculum standards and it remains to be seen whether the targets will be appropriate or indeed achievable.





3.8 Western Australia

A curriculum-oriented policy that governs all learning areas guides the provision of languages education in Western Australia. The Pre-primary to Year 10: Teaching, Assessing and Reporting Policy put in place by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (2016) sets out the requirements that all schools are expected to meet, including for language learning. The policy stipulates that, at a minimum, students will study one language starting from year 3, with language learning becoming optional from year 9.

The policy lays out a staggered timeline for implementation and reporting in the languages learning area, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Timeline for implementing and reporting for languages

Year	Year levels affected
2018	year 3
2019	year 4
2020	year 5
2021	year 6
2022	year 7
2023	year 8

The required times for study at various year levels are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Time allocations for various year levels

Year level	Time to be allocated
pre-primary to year 2 (non-mandated)	0-2 hours/week (0–120 mins)
years 3 to year 6	2 hours/week (120 mins)
year 7 to year 8	2 hours/week (120 mins)
year 9 onwards (non-mandated)	0-2 hours/week (0–120 mins)

The Western Australia policy does not follow the time allocations for the primary years outlined in the Australian Curriculum. Although there is greater duration of learning (ie 2 hours a week in years 3 to 6), even if schools followed the minimum requirements for years 3 to 6, overall, the programs would contain 30 hours fewer than those following the Australian Curriculum time allocations. The rationale for offering more intensive programs over fewer years is unclear. Has the policy adopted the principle of intensity over that of an early start or is the decision related to resourcing and teacher supply issues?

The Authority provides syllabuses (from prep to year 12) for second language learners in 6 languages. Schools may choose to offer other languages including indigenous languages and Auslan, as provided by the Australian Curriculum. Students for whom English is not their first language may substitute studies of English for the study of another language. The syllabuses have been contextualised for Western Australia and as part of this, have been developed as single year-level syllabuses. At the senior secondary level, syllabuses are offered in 6 languages, with some having 1 or more levels (ie first language, second language and background language). To complete the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE), students must complete 20 units, including compulsory English (2 units at year 11), 1 'pair' of year 12 units from list A (arts, languages, social sciences) and 1 pair from list B (mathematics, science, technology). Bonus points for students who study a language in Year 12 are allocated by individual universities and are calculated by adding 10% of the final scaled subject score to the student's Tertiary Entrance Aggregate (TEA), which is based on the best 4 scaled subject scores.





4. Overall findings

The analysis reveals a number of themes and trends that point to the current state of languages education policy in Australia.

Firstly, in the absence of a federal languages education policy, as in previous years, there has been a great deal of policy activity in language education across the nation and substantial diversity in the type and nature of policies. The policies range from no specific policy for languages in Tasmania through to the most elaborated and strongly resourced policy in Victoria. In recent years there have been a number of major policy developments, with New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory releasing new policies and the Australian Capital Territory currently developing a new policy.

Secondly, the nature of the policies varies substantially. Some are embedded within whole-of-curriculum policy documents (eg Western Australia), and others are specific, standalone, highly detailed documents (eg Northern Territory and Victoria). An embedded approach can imply that languages is mainstreamed along with all other learning areas as part of the national implementation of the Australian Curriculum (or its local variants). It can also signify that languages education is not receiving any particular attention or development that meets its specific needs, such as can occur within a policy tailored to languages education.

Thirdly, across the policies there appears to be a move towards greater accountability and indeed quantification of the impact of policies and of languages education itself. The inclusion of mechanisms such as targets, strategies, milestones, indicators of success and proficiency testing indicate an increased commitment and attention to data that provides evidence of improvements. In a number of the documents there is a move away from student participation data as the sole measure of success towards more fine-tuned, quality-oriented measurement such as students' perceptions and progress in learning.

A related feature across a number of the policies is the desire to take a long-term view of languages education. The inclusion of timelines for implementation (particularly in the curriculum-based policies) and the gradual phasing in of mandatory study for additional year levels (eg Queensland) suggests a desire to increase expectations while allowing schools and the sector the time to provide appropriate support. Although this does not reflect a move towards compulsion beyond the primary and junior secondary years, it does signal a tightening of expectations rather than mere encouragement of provision.

A common element across the policies nationally is the influence of the Australian Curriculum, not only in adoption of the indicative times for writing as the indicative times for program provision, but also in a move towards greater systemic consistency of provision and a sense of curriculum 'entitlement'. Again, this remains largely at the level of the compulsory years and there seems to be little appetite for compulsory language study for any year beyond year 8. Indeed, the New South Wales policy explicitly states that while the community is not convinced about the value of learning languages, compulsion will not be pursued.

The dominant framing of the policy documents continues to be the value of language learning for social and economic benefits, although the more recent policies appear to foreground cognitive and intercultural understanding benefits. There does not appear to be a strong discourse of bilingual and multilingual capabilities as related to ways of learning and knowing. Instead, the policies emphasise communication and the ability to interact with speakers of the target language as the principal goals of languages education.

Another notable feature across the policies is the renewed interest in bilingual and content-oriented language programs (also known as CLIL programs). Recently a number of states have introduced bilingual and CLIL programs (in a range of languages), where the target language becomes the medium of instruction more than the object of instruction. Such programs increase time on task substantially, hence proficiency gains are typically greater and lead to greater satisfaction with language learning among students and parents. However, these programs are isolated and require very selective staffing, curriculum and resourcing to be successful in the long term, and if they were to become the norm, would require substantial investment over a long period.

At the senior secondary level, there are no requirements in any state or territory to study a language and levels of participation and retention remain low, despite various attempts to provide incentives (eg bonus points). The policies in New South Wales and Victoria include intentions to remove obstacles to participation at the senior secondary level, particularly in relation to eligibility and perceptions about scaling impacting negatively on languages study. Almost all of the states and territories offer bonus points, however, there is little consistency about how many are offered, how these are calculated and how they are made available to students (eg some are allocated by the state/territory tertiary admissions authority whereas others require application within individual university courses).

Other areas that continue to feature in the policies that have been noted in various reports over many years include the need for workforce planning and pre-service preparation for a sufficient





supply of appropriately qualified language teachers. The Victorian and New South Wales policies both indicate actions in this area, with some desire to capitalise on existing bilingual pre-service students and community members. Several policies also mention the continued work needed to advocate for language learning within the wider community.

5. Implications and conclusion

The national landscape of languages education policy holds a number of implications for the policy development work occurring in South Australia.

Most importantly, the policy renewal process provides an opportunity to reimagine the nature of language education provision and to tackle some of the entrenched issues and obstacles related to this area of education. A key consideration therefore is the nature and status of a language education policy. This would mean considering whether the policy would be aligned with or emerge from a broader policy on multiculturalism and plurilingualism that might operate at the whole-of-government level, or whether it would be a more limited, standalone policy.

A related consideration is how a languages education policy would relate to curriculum policy and whether the current arrangements for implementation and reporting using the Australian Curriculum would be open to change or require compliance. That is, the scope for innovation and alternative models of provision would need to be determined.

There is an implication also for language learning in the senior years and whether or not the existing policy settings and SACE requirements are enabling sufficient participation and retention at this level. There is a question as to whether refining incentive schemes and eligibility practices (such as proposed in New South Wales and Victoria) are the most effective means of addressing the issue of low participation or whether alternative incentives or indeed requirements to study a language (or a combination of both) need to be developed.

Underpinning these considerations is the nature of the vision that underpins the policy. The goal or goals of the policy would need to be articulated clearly so that there is clarity among stakeholders and the community and also coherence with associated strategies or an implementation plan. As a recent example, the Auckland Council in New Zealand set a goal/target of increasing the 25% bilingual capability of its local population in 2006 to 50% by 2040 (COMET, 2015, p30). Articulating a long-term vision would require, for example, an indication of whether languages education would become mainstreamed or a specialist area, whether it would be delivered face-to-face, online or through some combination of these. The policy would also need to take into account the relationship

between sites as local policy-makers, and systemic policy requirements that focus on consistency and equity across the sector as a whole.

The policy analysis presented in this paper indicates that there is a mood in many areas of the nation for change and to reimagine languages education in light of the nature of the modern world, of contemporary understandings and innovations. There is an opportunity in the South Australian context to take a bold stance and to become a national/international leader in this area, however, as is evident from the discussion, this will require a new vision and a long-term commitment to realising and supporting it into the future.



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