

SUBMISSION FEEDBACK ON NSW CURRICULUM REVIEW INTERIM REPORT FROM SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES, UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

The School of Languages and Cultures (SLC) at the University of Sydney welcomes the NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report released on October 22, 2019 and appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback.

Our feedback refers to languages other than English; for this submission we use the term “language(s)” rather than “languages other than English (LOTE)” or “second language(s)” etc.

Our feedback is expressed below in two parts: reiteration/support of comments made in the submission; concerns/questions about comments made in the submission.

We support:

- The provision of a common entitlement for students that includes the opportunity to develop “a basic knowledge about, and appreciation of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, cultures and histories” (Reform Direction 4, p.9 [Consultation Workbook](#), Reforming the Content of the Curriculum). This is long overdue. We would reiterate that this development should be *at the very least* a basic knowledge and should incorporate opportunities to go *beyond* the basic level for those students who wish to do so. We advocate that appropriate levels of funding be provided to fulfil this commitment.
- The provision of a common entitlement for students that includes the opportunity to learn “a language other than English from primary school” (p.9, [Consultation Workbook](#), Reforming the Content of the Curriculum). We are pleased to read that the Review supports clearly the starting point for language learning as primary school; this echoes practice in Victoria where primary-school students learn languages from kindergarten to Year 6.
- The (long-term) objective to increase significantly language learning in NSW schools ([Section 7, Reforming the Content of the Curriculum, A common entitlement](#)). It’s great to see that the Review acknowledges firstly the important role of language learning and secondly that the current provision of 100 hours in NSW is extremely limited. The acknowledgement that Australia lags many other countries in this regard is important; our geographical isolation makes it even more important for students to learn languages other than their own if they are to succeed in our globalized world. Language learning is crucial to an understanding of identity, particularly in multicultural Australia. Research has identified other benefits of learning languages, including the development of complex, higher-order critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. The benefits have been recognized by other Australian states e.g. Victoria, where 18.4% of VCE students studied a second language to Year 12 in 2017, compared to 8% of HSC students in New South Wales.
- The idea of introducing language proficiency levels (presumably akin to the Common European Framework of Languages); this would facilitate the provision for continuity of language learning within and across sectors, as does the CEFR within and between educational institutions across Europe and where European languages are taught.
- The introduction of a uniform ATAR bonus points’ scheme to encourage more students to study languages. This would incentivize students to continue their language studies beyond primary or (junior) secondary school and would greatly raise the profile and status of languages. This suggestion has been made before e.g. in the [BOSTES February 2014 Review of Languages Education in NSW](#) (p. 28) and exists or has existed in other states, with a proven success rate.

Dr Carolyn Stott, Chair, School of Languages and Cultures Pedagogy Working Group,
on behalf of School of Languages and Cultures

We are concerned about:

- The suggested alternative to the ‘common entitlement’ that questions firstly the need for every student to develop a basic knowledge about, and appreciation of Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories, and secondly the expectation that every student study a language other than English from primary school (Reform Direction 4, p.9 [Consultation Workbook](#), Reforming the Content of the Curriculum). Given a choice, students (and their parents) may be intimidated by the perceived challenge of learning a second language and may not understand the importance of learning about Australia’s first peoples. We would thus strongly advocate inclusion of these as part of the ‘common entitlement’.
- The timeline and vague wording around the fulfilment of the proposed ‘long-term’ objective to increase significantly language learning in NSW schools. This is not the first time such an objective has been set but not fulfilled therefore we would welcome a firmer commitment.
- The provision for continuity of language learning from the primary to the secondary sector; how will this be done? How widespread will it be?
- The implementation of language proficiency levels; this is potentially a complex project that needs careful thought and planning
- The lack of mention of bilingual (immersion) programs; such programs should be considered where appropriate in primary and secondary schools along with other languages programs, and also as part of a plan for providing continuity across sectors. It would be beneficial to establish a number of high-quality bilingual programs in different languages in each region, in order to provide choice to parents who want to commit to this type of language learning for their children.
- The creation of a less crowded curriculum (Section 7, Reforming the Content of the Curriculum); would the prioritization of a smaller number of ‘demanding and high-quality courses’ ([Section 7, Reforming the Content of the Curriculum, A common entitlement](#)) in the senior years potentially exclude languages, or reduce the incentive for students to study them?
- The mention of continuity of language learning being dependent on the availability of teachers capable of teaching languages. The University of Sydney and other institutions offer courses firstly to train language teachers from scratch, and secondly to provide trained language teachers with ongoing professional development that is endorsed and accredited by NESA. The Sydney School of Education and Social Work and the School of Languages and Cultures at the University of Sydney offer support and training to languages teachers and assist in the development of high-quality language resources. Courses exist to train, retrain, maintain and upskill languages teachers; curriculum reform should not be dependent on current availability.
- There is no mention of heritage or background speakers nor of community languages. Policies that encourage heritage speakers to take language courses at school and at university should be implemented; currently various hurdles exist that discourage heritage and native speakers from doing so at university. Due to their background, these students and potential trainee language teachers possess valuable language and cultural resources that in turn would benefit their future students. Furthermore, the study of community languages reinforces the strength of Australia’s multicultural society and is highly valued by our language communities.