

# TOWARDS A LANGUAGES AND LEARNING POLICY FOR NSW

## Preamble

This statement sets out a rationale and framework for a policy on the role of education in enabling language diversity to flourish in NSW. It is intended to inform stakeholders and the community at large of how and why a State policy would support the individual and collective benefits of learning and maintaining and developing language diversity. The statement also discusses the main challenges for expanding languages education in NSW and proposes some key priorities that will strengthen their teaching.

This statement, in support of languages, is founded upon an affirmation of languages as intrinsic to identity and thereby to individual self-worth.<sup>1</sup> It thereby acknowledges that there is a broad international consensus on the value of multilingualism, as noted in the most recent of many public declarations on this topic: The Salzburg Statement for a Multilingual World (2017)<sup>2</sup>, which calls on Civil Society Organisations and governments to work towards policies that foster and support multilingualism all across the globe. In addition to the wide ranging cultural and intellectual value of languages there is growing appreciation that many freedoms and rights are connected to language. Rights concerning citizenship and belonging linked to languages are enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948), and subsequent Covenants, the Australian Racial Discrimination Act (1975, and as amended) and the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act (1977, and as amended). The Principles of Multiculturalism Act (2000) of NSW, *inter alia*, also acknowledges English in its role as the common language among Australians, which is a shared premise and conviction of this proposed policy.

## Rationale

The cultural and linguistic diversity embodied in the citizens of NSW is our heritage and our future. Languages are held to be central to individual cognitive and emotional development<sup>3</sup>, social cohesion, cultural understanding and economic development.

Knowing and regularly using more than one language can increase literacy development for young learners as well as forming a bridge to knowledge and know-how among individuals and between cultures globally. For all these benefits it is clear that all citizens of NSW should have access to opportunities for well designed, continuous and seriously intentioned languages learning at all levels of their education.

**Languages in Australia.** There are more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia<sup>4</sup> and as of 2016, there were 300 other 'separately identified languages' spoken in

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<sup>1</sup> Bialyslok, E., & Hakuta, K. (1994). *In Other Words: the psychology and science of second language acquisition*, New York: Basic Books

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.salzburgglobal.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Documents/2010-2019/2017/Session\\_586/SalzburgGlobal\\_Statement\\_586\\_-\\_Multilingual\\_World\\_combined\\_.pdf](https://www.salzburgglobal.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Documents/2010-2019/2017/Session_586/SalzburgGlobal_Statement_586_-_Multilingual_World_combined_.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Kroll, J. and Dussias, P. (2017) 'The Benefits of Multilingualism to the Personal and Professional Development of Residents of the US', *Foreign Language Annals*, Vol. 50, Iss. 2, pp. 248–259.

<sup>4</sup> Marmion, D., Obata, K., & Troy, J. (2014). *Community, identity, wellbeing: the report of the second National Indigenous Languages Survey [NILS 2]*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Australian homes.<sup>5</sup> According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 21% of the population speaks a language other than English.

The New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Act of 2017 recognises the unique context of Aboriginal languages in the state, in consideration of their status as the communication systems and cultural carriers of the first peoples of the land of NSW and their integral role as part of the world's oldest living cultures. The Act also recognises injustices perpetrated in the past which resulted in the near loss of all the uniquely Australian languages. Their survival, often through community efforts such as being spoken in secret and passed on through Aboriginal families and communities, is an heroic achievement of community action.

The Aboriginal Languages Act 2017 emphasises that Aboriginal people will be reconnected with their culture and heritage by the reawakening, growing and nurturing of their languages. It also acknowledges the importance of these languages to the cultural heritage all people in NSW. In respect to these considerations, the Act contains provisions such as the creation of a Trust to advise government on how best to protect, support and nurture Aboriginal languages in NSW. Whilst our policy proposal makes a broad call for extensive NSW efforts to support multilingualism, foreign language study and community languages education, it is important to recognise that Aboriginal languages have their own distinct claims and concerns.

Australia is also a nation founded upon immigration. On average, every year over the last 10 years, Australia has received approximately 180,000 permanent migrants<sup>6</sup> and by 2017, seven of the 10 top source countries for migrants have languages other than English as an official language. Immigration has added some 300 languages to the Australian community.

### **Languages in NSW**

NSW is the destination of choice for the majority of Australia's migrants, increasing its annual intake from 24.9 per cent in 2007-08 to 32.9 per cent in 2016-17.<sup>7</sup> NSW, also receives many more temporary migrants, international students and tourists, so that at any one time, there are upwards of two million migrants living, working or participating in the State.<sup>8</sup>

Whether supporting the domestic economy or for community purposes, or whether for international trade and engagement, languages other than English are a significant presence in the State's daily life.

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Islander Studies. This report indicates that communities are deeply involved in revitalising and maintaining their languages and cultures.

<sup>5</sup> Census Australia media release: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>

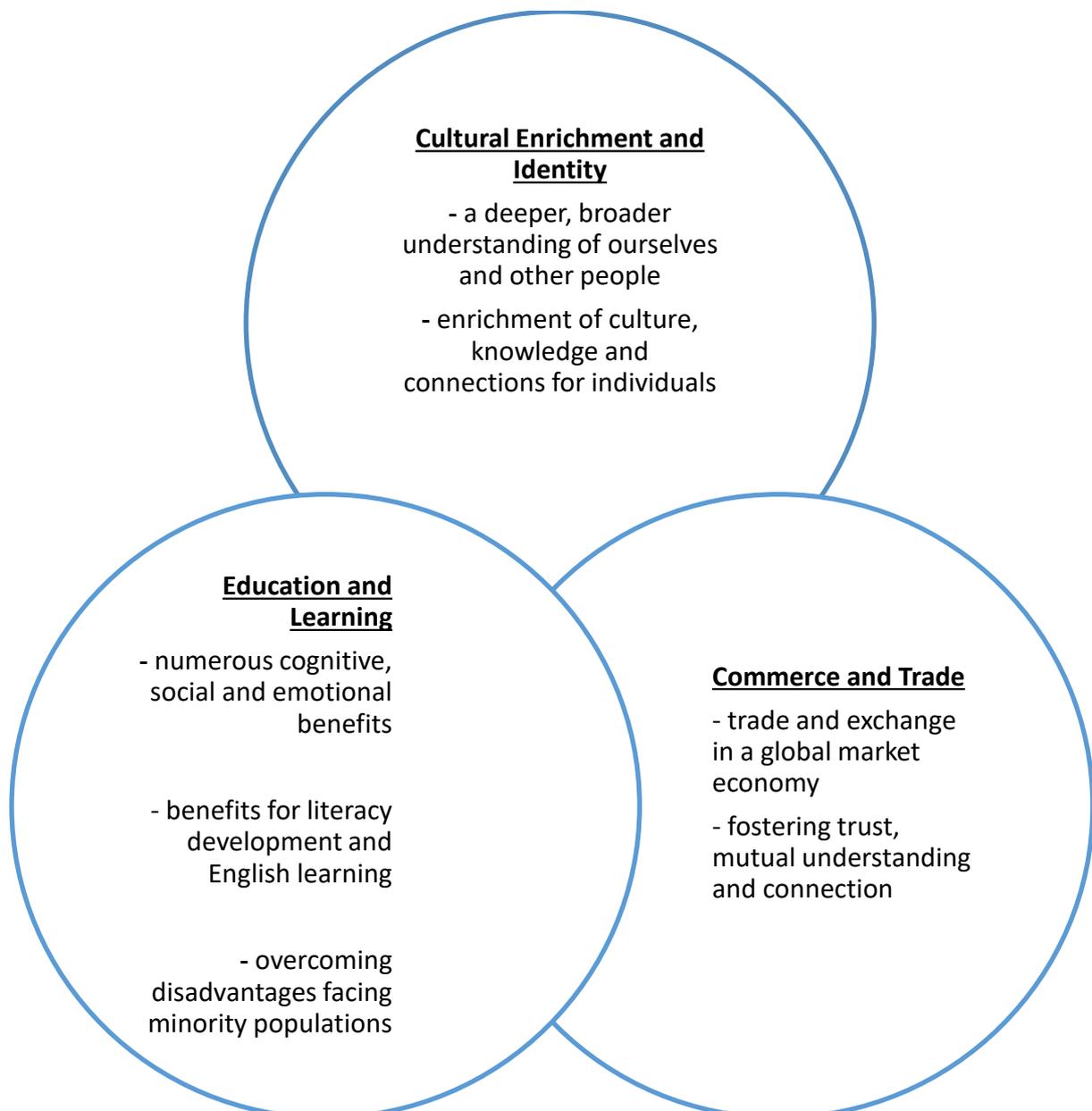
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/report-on-migration-program-2016-17.pdf> p.3

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/report-on-migration-program-2016-17.pdf> p.6

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/state-territory-migration-summary-june-2015.pdf>;  
<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/migration-australia-state-territories-2012-13.pdf> pp.30-32

In contrast to the facts of Australia's linguistic endowments and the multiple benefits of learning new languages and maintaining, cultivating and using existing language resources, current education policy in NSW is inadequate for the needs of contemporary multilingualism and the ongoing process of globalisation in which the economy and society of the State are enmeshed.

In fact, learning a language is not compulsory in NSW primary schools, and only 100 hours of language 'instruction' is mandated for students in their first four years of high school. Much more language learning occurs outside of school hours, typically in the 500 locations for the Community Languages Schools and on 15 sites of the Saturday School of Community Languages. However, extra-curricular languages education in Community Languages Schools does not enjoy uniform resourcing, does not articulate with any formal school language programs and consequently varies greatly in quality.



## Benefits of Languages Learning Policy

**Education and Learning** There is now strong evidence for the cognitive benefits of language learning for birth to old age<sup>9</sup>. Growing up with two languages is an advantage not a problem: young children who are bilingual have greater executive brain function evident in better working memory, flexibility in thinking, more paying attention and self control. Studies of school-aged young people indicates that language learning has cognitive, emotional and social benefits such as enhanced listening skills, improved memory and attention skills, along with flexibility and adaptability, all typical attributes associated with high levels of proficiency in more than one language.<sup>10</sup> Recent brain imaging studies show that bilinguals have increased grey and white matter in the brain. Even research into bilingual seniors shows delays in the onset of dementia and minimal cognitive complaints when compared with monolinguals. The focus on English only literacy is challenged by evidence that literacy gains achieved through home language enhance literacy in English through ‘language transfer’: the interplay of learning between one’s mother tongue and the language of instruction. In fact, there may be adverse effects of restricting access to languages for minority populations. “Monolingual, majority language education may also alienate students from the educational system, or create a sense of disconnectedness from the students’ own cultures.”<sup>11</sup> The research is ‘in’: language learning and bilingualism lead to great language and general benefits in thinking and reasoning.

Australia has produced many ambitious policies in support of languages learning: beginning with the *1987 National Policy on Languages*, and more recently the *National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools: National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005–2008* and the *National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP)*. The *National Statement for Languages Education* in 2008 identified a number of issues relevant to the provision of languages, namely “availability of teachers and resources, learner background, and continuity of languages learning, especially at transition points in schooling”. The local context was also noted as important – schools should offer languages with relevance to their local area and communities.<sup>12</sup> Community languages schools have much to offer in this context.

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<sup>9</sup> Li, Legault & Litcofsky, 2014, Neuroplasticity changes in the function of learning, *Cortex* 58, 301-324.

Crivello *et al*, 2016, The effect of bilingual growth on toddlers executive function, *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 141, 121-132.

Teubner-Rhodes *et al*, 2016, The effects of bilingualism on conflict management, cognitive control and darden-apth recovery, *Cognition* 150, 213-231.

Perquin M, Diederich N, Pastore J, Lair ML, Stranges S, Vaillant M, et al. (2015) Prevalence of Dementia and Cognitive Complaints in the Context of High Cognitive Reserve: A Population-Based Study. *PLoS ONE* 10(9): e0138818. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0138818

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.caslt.org/files/learn-languages/pch-bilingualism-lit-review-final-en.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Kosonen, 2008 cited in <http://www.oecd.org/education/ceeri/41504351.pdf> p.4; see footnote #13

<sup>12</sup> Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (Australia) (MCEETYA) & South Australia. Dept of Education and Children's Services (DECS) (2005). *National statement for languages education in Australian schools: national plan for languages education in Australian schools 2005-2008*.

### ***Cultural Enrichment and Identity***

The value of language learning is not simply in building relationships with trading partners, but also in developing deeper, broader understandings of ourselves in our communities and of other communities in people to people relationships. In these ways all forms of language study contribute directly to cultural enrichment and personal identity. The languages of ancestry, the acquisition of additional languages whether of communities close by or distant, and the retention of language skills across generations all contribute to the social and cultural richness available to individuals. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures are deeply connected to Land, and hence the self-knowledge of citizens and their relationship to the country we now share is fostered by the study of Indigenous languages.

### ***Commerce and Trade***

Language skills are also vital to successful trade and exchange with regional and global economies, and increasingly valued in the domestic multicultural economy of our country and state. In a global market economy, even though English is acknowledged as the main *lingua franca* for much business in today's world, a great deal of trade and investment is transacted in languages other than English with significant economic return.<sup>13</sup> Language abilities give Australian exporters, negotiators and market specialists additional valuable knowledge about target economies. This is considered particularly salient for service-based goods and products. Approximately 75% of Australia's GDP can be accounted for by services in the Financial, Legal, Tourism and Education sectors, which in value-added terms comprise 40% of Australian exports.<sup>14</sup>

Trust in relationships is important in business and communicating in the languages of our trading partners is one tangible way of extending that trust and understanding. In the Asia Pacific region China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan are four of New South Wales' largest trading partners<sup>15</sup>, all sizeable economies<sup>16</sup> making it in our collective interest to have the agility and ability to communicate in languages such as Japanese, Mandarin and Korean. The combined economies of the European Union, with its main non English exporting economies in Germany, France and Italy, is the largest trading zone in the world and a significant partner in all aspects of investment, exchange of goods and services for Australia.

In broad terms, migration has been used by successive State and Federal Governments as a policy lever to support economic growth. Migration increases demand for goods and

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<sup>13</sup> Foreman-Peck, J. and Zhou, P. (2015) *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 62, No. 4, September; Hagen, S. (2006) "Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise' CILT, the National Centre for Languages: United Kingdom

<sup>14</sup> <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/trade-in-services-australia-2017.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://dfat.gov.au/trade/resources/Documents/nsw.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/trade-in-services-australia-2017.pdf>; Gillard, Julia & Australia. *Australia in the Asian Century Task Force* (2012). *Australia in the Asian century* : White Paper. Australia in the Asian Century Task Force, Canberra

services; migrants bring with them ideas and connections to markets overseas. Extensive research into migrant entrepreneurs highlights benefits for individuals as well as for the

economies in which they are operating.<sup>17</sup> Businesses in the United Kingdom and Canada have reported significant economic loss due to a lack of diversity in language skills among their respective country's labour pools<sup>18</sup> while in Australia, the idea of an 'accent ceiling' has been proposed to explain the barriers to immigrant entrepreneurs to maximise opportunities.<sup>19</sup>

The economic case for learning or maintaining another language is strong. NSW has latent language talent which offers economic opportunity for individuals and the wide community.

## Challenges

There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed through or in parallel with the proposed policy.

- **Access to quality languages learning.** These challenges connect to an overarching lack of provision for languages teaching, and include:
  - Lack of access to continuous coherent language learning: fewer than one in six students who start school with language/s in addition to English will be able to maintain and develop that language. Fewer than one in 20 students with only English will be able to learn another language. In most Australian states languages are not core part of primary school curriculum.
  - Students in regional, rural areas and schools with lower socioeconomic status (SES) have particularly low access to continuing languages study. Teacher supply and online resources are particular issues in these schools.
  - Lack of continuity between early childhood, primary and high schools meaning that students start a language in primary school but often cannot continue it in high school. The attrition in senior high school then impacts on tertiary uptake.
  - Lack of continuity in secondary schools with the teaching of different "taster" languages and having no elective languages after 100 hours

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.caslt.org/files/learn-languages/pch-bilingualism-lit-review-final-en.pdf>; Kloosterman, R. and Rath, J. [eds.] (2003) *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Venturing Abroad in the Age of Globalization*, Oxford: Berg;

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.caslt.org/files/learn-languages/pch-bilingualism-lit-review-final-en.pdf>; Conversis (2015) *Importance of Global Talent within International Businesses*, <http://www.conversis.com/ConversisGlobal/media/ConversisMedical-Images/Conversis-Global-Talent-Report-Download.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Collins, J. and Low, A. (2010) 'Asian female immigrant entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized businesses in Australia', *Journal of Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: An International Journal*; Volume 22, 2010 - Issue 1 and Medium-Sized Businesses (SMEs) Arising from Ethnically, Racially and Religiously Diverse Populations

- No clear means to identify what level of fluency students have developed through any program at any stage of schooling.
- Bureaucratic constraints in the Saturday School of Community Languages and NSW School of Languages limit their ability to cater for all students wanting to study languages.
- **Teachers.** Teacher supply is a major issue at early childhood, primary and secondary level, and a particular problem for regional schools. Fewer students, graduates and teachers are opting to become languages teachers because of the low employment prospects and status of languages teaching. There are an estimated 2,000 overseas-trained teachers unable to gain accreditation in NSW; there are insufficient pathways for these teachers to re-enter the profession, particularly in early childhood settings and primary schools. Possible solutions include improving the pathways for overseas-trained teachers; and offering scholarships and targeted places for candidates with proficient languages skills into preservice teacher education and into teaching; raising the status and job opportunities for languages teachers.
- **Learner pathways.** The structure of the HSC and, particularly, ATAR requirements create significant disincentives for language learners which has a washback effect on uptake in junior secondary schools. Languages are seen as too ‘difficult’ and not useful in gaining good tertiary entry scores.
- **Attitudes to languages learning.** There are strong perceptions in early childhood settings and schools and in the broader community that school languages study has little support and is seen of little value<sup>20</sup> There is some evidence of negative attitudes to community languages and that they are seen as a problem not a benefit for schools and society. These perceptions have led to the low status of languages in secondary, primary and early childhood settings/schools. There is also evidence that parents and school staff are themselves strongly in support of languages study<sup>21</sup>. This contradiction indicates misunderstanding in schools and community about the value of languages study. Related issues reported are:
  - Poorly informed teachers and other professionals advising parents to speak only English to their children at home;
  - Fear that learning or speaking languages other than English will inhibit students’ ability to learn English;
  - General confusion about how children and young people learn languages;
  - Perceptions that learning a language is too hard, or that there is no need for background English speakers to learn another language; and

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<sup>20</sup> All major surveys indicate that school staff and parents **think** languages study is not useful for students.

<sup>21</sup> McConchie et al

A belief by parents from community languages backgrounds that it is more important for their children to learn English than other languages, including those of their parents;

- **Resources for community languages and other schools.** Lack of resources (money, teachers and physical classroom space) can threaten the sustainability of languages programs. Other resource-related challenges are firstly, the role of commercial providers. There is concern about both the quality of the pedagogy underpinning commercially-supplied packages, and perceived government willingness to require schools to use commercial packages; and secondly, IT infrastructure and equipment and space. Most community languages are taught in “borrowed” classrooms, which reduces the ability for students and teachers to feel a sense of ownership and creates obstacles to learning.

## Priorities for Action

### 1. Role of languages in the curriculum

- **Ensure languages as a key learning area and equity of access to continuous languages learning through all stages of schooling, early childhood, primary and secondary.** This would involve articulation, a requirement and incentives for languages study. Languages need to become a key learning area P-6 as has been done in Victoria, New Zealand and in other ways in other Australian states with rollout in languages study K-6. It would involve increasing by 100 the FTE (full time equivalent) positions for teachers in the NSW K-6 Community Languages Program. It would also involve increasing the requirement of mandatory languages study in Years 7 - 10 from 100 to 200 hours to align Languages with History and Geography.
- **Strengthen support mechanisms specific to Aboriginal languages.** These may be based in metropolitan, regional and rural communities. It is essential that Aboriginal languages programs are implemented through local community consultation and leadership, and in accordance with community protocols and guidelines.

### 2. Improve the teacher supply system

- **Increase the numbers of early childhood and primary education graduates as language specialists** through the implementation of languages specialisation in tertiary institutions and the establishment of tertiary places and scholarships.
- **Improve numbers of teachers with overseas qualifications gaining accreditation** through NESAs. This will involve the provision of careers counselling, accessible information, support in meeting English language requirements and the provision of accessible upgrading programs where needed. Jurisdictions also need to provide suitable induction and support for overseas-trained teachers.
- **All education systems set explicit targets for language-skilled early childhood and primary teachers for employment.** This should increase universities’ willingness to

adapt their teacher-training programs to incorporate languages. Such a program should also recognise bilingualism in teachers who have completed generalist

- teacher training courses plus an additional bi/multilingualism appropriate short course in the pedagogy of language teaching overseas.
- **Provide scholarships and incentives for existing teachers to gain accreditation with language specialisation.** This would involve system surveys of teachers to gauge levels of proficiency in languages additional to English and interest in undertaking professional development. It would also involve the provision of scholarships for early childhood, primary and secondary teachers in languages and languages education. Scholarships should require recipients to teach languages as part of their existing role in schools.

## 2. Expand bilingual education

- **Expand community-connected bilingual education. Identify, support, strengthen and** expand the current range of bilingual programs in NSW schools to 10 exemplar schools to be badged as 'international' schools. Introduce 20 CLIL programs in primary schools to be rolled out at a rate of five per year over four years. Use local government areas as the underpinning structure; focus initially on areas which already have continuous language provision between primary and high school but ensure coverage across the state, not just in Sydney. These programs should reflect a wide diversity of languages, and have strong community connections through their governing bodies. CLIL is a prominently evaluated program currently and under this there should be a consistent effort
- **Build awareness of the benefits of language and bilingual education.** There is a wealth of Australian and international research indicating the educational, cognitive, social, cultural and economic benefits of learning languages. There is also evidence that the introduction of languages P-10 has strong parent, school and community support which contradicts common perceptions. It is recommended that evidence-based promotion of language learning and its benefits be undertaken for schools and community.

## 3. Increase the numbers of students taking languages for the HSC

- **Ensure equal ranking of all languages with comparable outcomes.** NSW languages syllabuses are outcomes based and aligning outcomes across languages is a feasible goal. Exploring the alignment of languages, particularly community languages could lead to more equitable ranking of languages for tertiary entry.
- **Increase the flexibility of the HSC** so that students can do languages in year 11, following the model used for the VCE in Victoria.
- **Consider incentives for languages study such as bonus points for languages and language-based placements in industry.**

#### 4. Credit and acknowledge the role of the community language schools sector

- **Increase the transferability of language-learning** by creating a consistent framework that recognises learning and enables students to move between schools and systems using a single “passport”. Validated progression of knowledge and skills.
- **Support and explore funding for preschool and adult learners.** Community languages schools are already increasingly establishing preschool and adult classes due to strong community demand. Parents are wanting to strengthen children's language proficiency before beginning school , whilst adult classes are catering for those who have recognised the importance of learning their language after leaving school.
- Both of these initiatives would recognise community languages schools as integrated with rather than complementary to their mainstream counterparts.

#### Glossary

Language, dialect, variety and form

Multilingualism/ plurlingualism

Community/ heritage language