

ROADMAP FOR LANGUAGES EDUCATION IN NSW

Discussion Paper (draft)

Introduction

This document outlines a roadmap for change, in the provision of languages education in NSW.

NSW has the greatest level of languages resources in the community of all states in Australia and one of the highest internationally. Over 30% of the NSW population have languages fluency gained through family background, study or travel but provision and uptake of languages in schools is below all Australian states (Multicultural NSW 2021; CESE, 2021).

It is a matter of equity: young people in rural, regional and lower-SES schools have the least access to learning languages. Only 15% of NSW primary students have access to language learning at Stage 1,2 or 3 while in Victoria, South Australia, NT and Western Australia, 100% of students have access at all or some of Stages 1,2,3 (CESE, 2021; DET Victoria, 2021). Only 7% of NSW Year 12 students graduate with languages study compared with 21% in Victoria. Three in every 10 NSW students start school with a community language in addition to English but only one in 15 students leaves school with languages study (Cruickshank et al, 2020).

Covid 19 has continuing impacts, exacerbating the divisions in languages study. Language teacher shortages have become extreme; differential access to technology in rural, regional and lower-SES families has entrenched the gap between those who can and cannot study languages.

Languages are a fundamental resource for learning and core learning areas in the Australian curriculum (<https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-year-10/learning-areas-subjects>). Research in the past 20 years has highlighted the cognitive, social and creative benefits of languages learning for all young people: Language students have better problem-solving skills and mental flexibility; they have stronger intercultural skills and perform better in all school subjects. Students learning languages have higher outcomes in English and literacy (Fox *et al*, 2019). Recent Australian research has shown students in bilingual classes perform higher in NAPLAN than their peers in monolingual classes (Fielding & Harbon, 2022). Aboriginal languages play a role in school education for the benefit of Aboriginal students and for contributing to Reconciliation (Aboriginal Languages Act, 2017). Community languages are key resources to be developed both within and beyond schools (Cardona *et al*, 2007). Languages being available to all students was therefore central to the NSW Curriculum Review (ACER, 2020) with their recommendation for languages in all primary schools. Robust language diversity in the community is strongly aligned with greater social cohesion, socioemotional and physical wellbeing and identity.

This roadmap has been compiled by a group of expert languages teachers and associations, teacher educators, researchers and academics. It draws upon decades of research as to the educational benefits of language education, perspectives from practitioners in the field and in-depth knowledge of challenges in schools and universities. It is grounded in the common vision of the educational and economic need to grow linguistic diversity and capability in all NSW schools, across all sectors. It attends to practical initiatives designed for the unique NSW context, framed by the three core principles below. It considers all language learning to be part of a common educational continuum: Aboriginal languages, community languages and school-based additional languages. This document

does not attempt the detailed level required for implementation: it is meant as a stimulus document to engender collaborations with key stakeholders, political will, and an advocacy coalition.

The key focus areas in this roadmap align with the Reform Directions and National Policy Initiatives in *National Schools Reform Agreement* (2020).

- A. Supporting students, student learning and student achievement
- B. Supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement
- C. Enhancing the national evidence base.

Three Core Principles

The strategies outlined in this roadmap are all predicated on three core principles for learning success: (a) start early (b) progress learning and (c) sustain learning. We note that connectedness with communities is an underlying understanding that runs throughout. Specific recommendations follow.

Principle 1. Stem language loss and start early: *Early childhood and K-6 languages learning*

Regardless of whether children are continuing or starting their language learning, all research supports the cognitive and socioemotional benefits of early language learning. The NSW 2020 Curriculum Review provided a good picture of what is needed in high quality curriculum to provide for the changing nature of Australian society. It strongly recommended making language study mandatory in NSW primary schools. (see Recommendation 5.2 - ACER, 2020)

To start early is to create a cornerstone of skills, enthusiasm, curiosity and expertise in both students and teachers. At beginner levels of language learning there are significant cognitive and literacy benefits. The development and accreditation of languages specialisation within Early Childhood education programs is thus crucial.

The introduction of mandatory Languages provision in every NSW primary school will ensure the place of Languages as a Key Learning Area. This document tackles the teacher supply issue with many flexible approaches, as has been done in other states, to make first steps achievable within 5 years. The two further principles of progressing learning and sustainability are enabled by this first foundational early-start learning in primary schools.

Principle 2. Progress learning: *Increase learning time*

Time-on-task is a principle across all learning areas: that students must have enough learning hours to cover core competencies and to achieve levels of mastery. The roadmap calls for two aspects of time-on-task: The current 100 hours of mandatory language learning in Stage 4 (Year 7 and 8) is completely inadequate for any kind of learning satisfaction and functional outcomes. This needs to be expanded to 200 mandatory hours, to bring Languages into line with Stage 4 learning requirements of other subjects such as Geography and History. 200 Hours program affords greater sustained motivation and experience, more satisfying mastery, and engagement. This is in line with the stated educational goal to provide every student, in each phase of their learning, with strong foundations for what comes next (ACER, 2020).

This investment in turn will support sustained learning in the formation of elective classes in Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10). For equity, all schools need to offer, and support the formation of elective language classes. Stage 5 elective classes represent the pool of students who have the competencies to proceed to Stage 6 language classes. We note that currently only 7% of all Stage 5 students in NSW government schools (5,545) (CESE 2021) study a language. This is the total pool, for all languages, from which to draw Year 11 Continuers classes. Languages is the only elective learning area where the formation of “Continuers” senior classes depends on the sustainability of a single subject through high school. It is Year 11 and 12 language students who are the role models of sustained language mastery in the school.

Principle 3. Sustain learning: *Continuity in the provision of language learning*

Language learning requires continuity to gain fluency but at present languages are electives in all except 100 hours in Years 7 and 8. Sustainability means changes at all levels: for students - sustained mastery, across both primary and secondary school learning; for schools – the building of sustained expertise in school leadership, through supporting school principals and the creation of an increased pool of qualified languages teachers; at systemic level - evidence-based approaches through consistent and coherent annual cross-sectoral data collection recording provision and participation. This will enable accurate analysis of progress and needs, accountability and management beyond the school, in understanding school needs and development.

Actions

Action 1:

Mandatory language provision rolled out by stages in NSW primary schools from 2024 linked with increasing language teacher supply in primary and Early Childhood education.

Action 2:

Increase mandatory hours of the study of one language from 100 to 200 hours in Stage 4 (Year 7/8)

Action 3:

Enable all secondary schools to offer a continuous language learning pathway Year 7-12.

Action 4:

Establish annual data collection of participation in languages education in NSW schools and alignment of provisions across educational sectors

Strategies – How to approach this?

Curriculum

- A scoping study across sectors on the current provision of languages education in Early Childhood centres and K-6 be undertaken.
- All NSW primary schools be required to begin offering a languages program at a selected grade from 2026. Languages to be offered to all primary students ES1 -Stage 3 by 2032.
- Creation of Key Learning Area Languages for ES1-Stage 3, in line with the years of work already invested in creating the new K-10 Modern Language syllabus which is based on a framework approach that supports the teaching of any modern language.
- An adequate mandatory minimum number of hours for language programs: 80-120 hours per Stage (e.g Stage 3, Year 5 and 6) in line with Australian Curriculum recommendation
- Principals share timetabling models from schools that currently offer 200 hours language study across Year 7-8.
- Reliable and extended funding to the expansion of Aboriginal languages programs on Country, and training of teachers in consultation with leadership in the current NSW Aboriginal Languages and Cultures Nests initiative.

Continuity in language learning – Provision of continuous language learning pathways

- Collaboration between primary and secondary principals is supported to enable continuity in language program choices, meaningful learning progression from Stage 3 to Stage 4 and sharing of resources
- Primary school principals be given guidance regarding, links to existing local language learning in pre-schools, Community language schools and local primary schools. Models of existing linkages and practice to be disseminated.
- The sharing of specialist Stage 6 languages teachers across schools (e.g Extension courses) be supported to enable continuity in language learning
- Special Staffing Supplement provided to support staffing Stage 6 Continuers and Extension courses sometimes necessitated by smaller elective classes for languages.
- Funding similar to the previous School Language Programs (SLP) be reinstated, whereby principals receive a supplement for every student studying a language at HSC level.
- Strengthening links between secondary schools and universities to support the running of Stage 6 Continuers and Extension courses.

Teacher supply

- Universities be supported to offer languages specialisation in ITE (Early childhood and primary education degrees) programs.
- Priority places in ITE programs be given to applicants with HSC language study.
- Employer bodies provide targeted positions created for new K-6 teachers with HSC/ tertiary language study.
- Accreditation programs for existing early childhood and primary teachers with language proficiency be expanded and promoted.
- Opportunities for existing primary and early childhood teachers to study languages and gain proficiency for teaching
- Flexible movement between primary / secondary language teaching positions be enabled.



- The sharing of languages teachers across schools and sectors using existing networks dependent on geographical locations.
- Pathways for volunteer teachers in NSW Community Languages schools to gain teacher accreditation in NSW primary/ secondary schools.
- Pathways and accreditation processes for teachers of Aboriginal languages be established.
- Technology options to provide access to language learning on a regular basis

Expanded teacher supply

- Support for Universities to enable ITE secondary students to study a 2nd AND 3rd teaching method.
- Support for existing teachers with language proficiency to gain approval to teach languages as third method.
- Scholarships be offered to existing teachers to study a language to teach the 200 hours in Years 7 and 8.
- Flexible movement between primary / secondary language teaching positions be enabled.
- Continuing support for overseas-trained teachers/ professionals in Community languages schools to become accredited teachers.

Language teacher retention

- Support for language teacher professional learning and leadership pathways from tertiary institutions, professional associations and education sectors.
- Support for early career language teachers including mentoring and sharing of resources via development of online resource portals

Supporting School Leadership

Support principals with:

- Enabling collaboration between school sectors and regional and urban collaborative consultation groups of principals to share expertise on timetabling, resourcing and language program implementation strategies.
- Providing research demonstrating the link between enhanced literacy outcomes and additional language learning

Professional learning and resources

- Existing online resources for K-6 languages be assessed and made publicly available to all teachers.
- Continue developing open-access resources to help teachers maintain their target language and pedagogical knowledge.
- Professional learning and membership of professional networks be open to all NSW language teachers.
- Increased professional learning and consultancy positions for Languages
- Professional learning resources in teaching Aboriginal languages be developed and delivered flexibly through suitable organisations.

Evidence-Based provision and uptake of languages

- **Annual data collection** and reporting of all NSW cross-sector schools, relevant to participation in language study in schools K-12. This has been a recommendation of every Australian study report since the *National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco, 1987) and will:
 - enable the evaluation of progress towards goals in Actions 1, 2, and 3,
 - ensure transparency and accountability and analyse effectiveness of the allocation
 - identify emerging issues and needs in programs over a 9 year period 2024-2033.
- **Advisory group** monitoring and reporting on cross-sectoral provisions of languages from early childhood to adult (adult education, TAFE and tertiary).
- Continuing support for Community Languages schools sector in supporting their key role in languages education.
- Promotion and dissemination of information outlining the values, benefits and future potential of studying languages.

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