Attitudes Towards the Study of Languages in Australian Schools

The National Statement and Plan - making a difference or another decade of indifference?

A draft for consultation

A report for the Australian Council of State School Organisations and the Australian Parents Council based on research conducted by Solved at McConchie Pty Ltd

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Executive Summary

> ***"Learning a language in Australia should be seen like learning Maths or English, kicking a ball at recess time or eating lunch - it is a normal part of the curriculum in which every student should participate. It is part of an education for life."*** [1]

Sadly, for many students in many Australian schools learning a language is not a normal part of the curriculum as envisaged by this South Australian teacher. The sub-title of this report is deliberatively provocative – will the National and Statement and Plan be acted upon to make a difference to the state of language education in Australian schools; or will the next decade parallel the history of the last, when the momentum for change in relation to languages was gradually lost only to be replaced by an indifferent political and educational leadership and a generally apathetic public?

> *"I think that in general, Australians think of educating their children for local, not global capacities."* [2]

Language has been the Key Learning Area that has been politically easy to ignore. Languages have slipped off the education agenda over the last decade, and public debate has been virtually non-existent. No political party has sought votes for language education in the same way that other educational topics have been thrust into the spotlight from time to time. If anything, the present Federal government rhetoric has turned Australians more inward, through a focus on "Australian values and culture", the primacy of learning English and emphasising the assimilation of new arrivals as opposed to the ideals of multiculturalism. And the States, which have the fundamental responsibility for education in Australia, are just as complicit. They too have allowed languages to languish.

The National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools represents another restart of the languages debate. If it was the first time that languages education had been placed on the agenda for priority action, it surely would have been met with considerable enthusiasm. However, a study of the recent history of this curriculum area reveals that languages education has been on a stop start pathway since the 1980's. Aspirations and targets have not been matched by the resources to deliver quality programs. Reports such as Language Teachers: The Pivot of Policy [3] reported that language teaching in Australia was hobbled by a shortage of qualified languages teachers. This situation still exists.

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[1] Teacher, SA
[2] Tertiary Language Teacher, Victoria
[3] Language Teachers: The Pivot of Policy. NBEET. 1996

The National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools ('the Statement') reads well, providing an excellent rationale for the reasons why languages should be taught in schools. It is a document which should be supported by all who are interested in making Australia a country that can genuinely take its place on the international stage. In essence, it provides a strong argument that educational jurisdictions should be promoting and extending the reach of language education. In releasing this document, Education Ministers are to be commended, but they have set themselves a considerable challenge. That challenge is to attach appropriate funding to match the ideals and intent of the document.

The Statement provides a strong foundation on which to base an implementation plan that realises the aspirations contained in the document. Unfortunately the accompanying National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008 ('the Plan') cannot in any way be regarded as a plan which implements the Statement. It is a timid document which steps around the periphery of a major weakness in Australian education. On analysis it has no priorities and no funding commitments attached to it. At best the Plan provides a basis for the allocation of project money designed to facilitate further research, information gathering and perhaps a public relations exercise. At worst it will do nothing to convince stakeholders that MCEETYA is serious about making the Statement one of reality.

This study believes that for the Statement to have credibility, it must be supported by a fully funded National Implementation Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2009 – 2012 which replaces the current plan on its expiry in 2008. In the event that such a plan is not produced, this study recommends that the only honest approach is for MCEETYA to formally withdraw the National Statement, on the grounds that it provides the community with expectations that are both unrealistic and unachievable.

This research finds that there is strong support for languages education from those people who participated in the study. However all groups said that Australian society, and within it, the parents of Australian school-children, were in general apathetic towards languages education. The study also found that a significant number of school communities reflected the same national apathy.

Whilst many of the findings of this study are not at all surprising, they are important as they bring together the views of six stakeholder groups. In this respect, the study is unique, as it introduces a broad perspective into the debate. The main findings include:

- Governments need to exercise leadership through giving clear messages of support for language education, not mixing the messages

with words and actions that detract from the intent of the National Statement and Plan.

- There are simply too few qualified language teachers to guarantee access to quality programs. More language teachers need to be trained. There should be incentive programs to recruit and retain language teachers in our schools.
- There is an appalling disconnect between the levels of schooling that affects the smooth transition of students. This needs to be addressed as a priority.
- The purpose of language education is not clearly articulated, judging by the range of programs that are regarded as acceptable by authorities. The nature of inter-cultural language learning is not clear to the public or to practitioners.
- Existing systemic syllabuses or teaching guidelines are at best unhelpful and at worst non-existent for language education in many primary schools.
- Incentives for schools to offer, and for students to study languages need to be introduced.
- Too little time is allocated by schools to language learning and the way that time is arranged often affects the continuity of study.
- In many primary schools, language teachers provide the release time for mainstream teachers. This practice is counter-productive to run effective language programs, and needs to be addressed.
- Language teachers often work in isolation, and need greater access to professional development and networking opportunities.
- Language teachers need classrooms to call their own.
- There is a disconnect between universities, schools and school systems which works against good planning and other aspects of languages education.
- A concerted campaign to promote language education is required. A part of this campaign should involve professional learning programs for school leadership teams, careers advisors and other classroom teachers to improve the level of whole school support.
- Parent organisations have a role to play in improving the status of languages in the eyes of the community.
- The national Plan should make explicit an expectation that parents have a role to play in the implementation of the Plan.
- Education jurisdictions and authorities should audit their current policies and operational practices and abandon any that work in opposition to the intent of the Statement and Plan.

The study concludes that despite the picture of systemic neglect that emerges in this study, there are many examples of good practice and sufficient community and professional support on which MCEETYA can build in implementing its vision, as expressed in the National Statement.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1
Education Ministers should attempt to align their respective government policies and public statements in related portfolios with the intent of the National Statement and Plan so that there can be no ambiguity in relation to the strength of their government's commitment towards the value of learning languages in schools.

Recommendation 2
For the Statement to have credibility, it must be supported by a fully funded National Implementation Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2009 – 2012 which replaces the current Plan on its expiry in 2008. In the event that such a plan is not produced, this study recommends that MCEETYA formally withdraw the National Statement on the grounds that it provides the Australian community with unrealistic expectations of governments.

Recommendation 3
The correlation between literacy in English and learning other languages needs to be made explicit. Language teachers and English teachers should ensure that the pedagogy used in English is consistent with, or at least overlaps with, the pedagogies used in languages classes.

Recommendation 4
The low morale of language teachers needs to be acknowledged and steps should be taken at to address this at national, state, regional and school levels where appropriate. A designated "Year of Languages Education" as flagged in the Plan would go some way towards addressing this issue, as would the identification and implementation of a range of employment incentives directed towards supporting these teachers.

Recommendation 5
Each jurisdiction needs to audit the effectiveness of its regional planning and provision in schools and establish an action plan to address deficiencies.

Recommendation 6
MCEETYA needs to prioritise the actions in the Plan, avoiding those pseudo actions where further research is not required. Jurisdictions should direct their funding to these priority areas.

Recommendation 7
Reducing the extent of compulsion would send wrong messages about the value of languages education. It is recommended that schools and jurisdictions maintain the current levels of compulsion, and work on increasing the quality of provision.

Recommendation 8
Jurisdictions and schools should not reduce the number of languages that are currently taught. They should consider increasing the range in individual schools to provide students with greater choices, particularly in the junior high school years.

Recommendation 9
Education jurisdictions should publish information about language teaching and learning electronically, and share this information with other jurisdictions and schools across state borders and between government and non-government schooling sectors.

Recommendation 10
Inter-cultural language learning needs to be clearly defined and steps should be taken to inform all stakeholders just what is and what is not legitimate to be included in this approach. Jurisdictions and schools should assist languages teachers by clarifying curriculum documentation and producing sample courses (including resource lists) for teachers to follow.

Recommendation 11
Jurisdictions and schools should look for creative ways to abandon the model whereby language teachers provide release time for other teachers in primary schools, as this practice places major constraints in implementing an integrated approach to languages education at this level.

Recommendation 12
Wherever possible, schools should make concerted efforts to provide languages teachers with their own dedicated classrooms.

Recommendation 13
Authorities/schools should examine their timetabling practices and establish alternative models for schools to follow that do not discriminate against languages learning. Such an examination would include looking at issues that affect the continuity of language learning, the frequency of lessons and competition from other subject areas. Plans should be developed to gradually increase the time allocated to languages lessons in those schools where the time allocation is judged to be inadequate.

Recommendation 14
Each jurisdiction needs to audit the effectiveness of the primary to secondary transition in every cluster of schools and establish an action plan to address deficiencies.

Recommendation 15
Jurisdictions and schools should allocate extra staffing resources to avoid situations where grouping students who are at very different levels of proficiency disadvantages both groups.

Recommendation 16
Curriculum authorities should examine senior secondary course provision to ensure that courses which differentially target native speakers and non-native speakers are available through to Year 12. The level of difficulty of Year 12 courses and assessment should be re-assessed.

Recommendation 17
Schools and education authorities should establish policies of providing incentives directed towards boosting the attractiveness of learning languages through to the end of Year 12, and back up these policies with appropriate funding.

Recommendation 18
As resources permit, schools and education authorities should commence introducing languages education into first two years of primary school.

Recommendation 19
Schools and jurisdictions should work on making the links between learning languages and the increased career options which are available for young people who have language expertise. Careers advisors need to be made aware of these opportunities.

Recommendation 20
Schools and jurisdictions should consider the requirements of language classes and classrooms when planning ICT infrastructure provision in schools.

Recommendation 21
Relevant authorities should establish an action plan that produces significant yearly increases in the numbers of language teachers in training, commencing immediately. Baseline data for the number of language teachers currently in training should be established, and each year from 2008 onwards the number of teachers in training be compared with the baseline data. This data should be published widely on an annual basis.

Recommendation 22
Relevant employing authorities should establish a suite of employment related changes and incentives designed to recruit language teachers to the teaching profession and to retain them once they have been recruited. A pool of incentive funding needs to be established to support such a policy.

Recommendation 23
Education authorities and universities need to establish structures whereby they work together to evaluate the success of existing language courses and to design new ones that support the intent of the National Statement, including re-training of classroom teachers.

Recommendation 24
Education departments and employing authorities should address concerns about the nature and availability of teacher professional development as a matter of urgency. Similarly, the development of learning programs for school leaders on the value of languages should commence in the context of promoting the National Statement.

Recommendation 25
Schools should be assisted to audit their current practice in languages education against the principles embodied in good practice. They should identify shortfalls in their own operations and develop individual action plans to address such shortfalls.

Recommendation 26
Examples of good practice should be collected from schools and jurisdictions nationally, ensuring a range of diversity. Case studies should be written up in plain English, published and disseminated to every school in the country. This initial process should then be followed up with a national roll out of professional development for school communities to discuss the research. The outcome would be the establishment of statewide or regional planning teams to re-structure school language programs along best practice lines.

Recommendation 27
Each education jurisdiction should identify and publicly acknowledge those policies and practices that run counter to the intent of the National Plan, and report back to MCEETYA outlining the steps that the jurisdiction is taking to eliminate or change those policies and practices, including milestones and a timetable of expected completion.

Recommendation 28
That MCEETYA support a nationwide media campaign to promote the value of languages education. This campaign should utilise the services of experienced and innovative marketing organisations, and have national, state and local elements.

Recommendation 29
The Plan should be adjusted to acknowledge and incorporate a significant level of parental involvement taking into account the fact that parents are significant stakeholders in the entire exercise of planning for change. Parental involvement should also be incorporated into any revised or new implementation plan that is produced.

About this research

In 2006, the Australian Council of State School Organisations, in conjunction with the Australian Parents Council, commissioned a research project to investigate the attitudes held towards the study of languages in Australian schools by parents, students, language teachers, principals, language advisors in education authorities and tertiary language educators.

Whilst this research does not form part of the DEST funded Languages in Schools Program, it aims to inform elements of that program, as well as the on-going implementation of the MCEETYA National Statement and Plan for Languages in Australian Schools, 2005 – 2008 (the Plan).

Support for languages education is strongly advocated by both parent groups, who believe that quality school language programs are essential if Australians are to play a role on the world stage - economically, socially and culturally. Parents want to assist in the implementation of the Plan. Both ACSSO and the APC look forward to being involved as the Plan is further discussed, refined and hopefully rolled out.

The main instrument utilised in this research was a web based electronic survey, with sections tailored for each stakeholder group. Respondents were provided with some 50-60 propositions. Responses were invited on a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree through to Strongly Disagree. A sixth option (Don't Know) was provided for those people who had insufficient knowledge of an issue to provide a meaningful response.
The survey was administered in September - November 2006, and forms the basis of this report. Participant data is summarised in Table 1.

	ACT	NSW	NT	Qld	SA	Tas	Vic	WA	Total	% of total
Parents	76	100	6	155	40	46	113	99	635	19.4%
Students	31	154	2	124	123	91	231	217	973	29.7%
Languages teachers	26	246	14	237	120	42	345	153	1183	36.1%
Principals	11	44	7	39	30	9	82	46	268	8.2%
Language Advisors	3	11	2	34	8	6	20	11	95	2.9%
Tert Lang Teachers	4	36	0	31	8	8	27	6	120	3.7%
Total	151	591	31	620	329	202	818	532	3274	100%
% of total	4.6%	18.1%	0.9%	18.9%	10.0%	6.2%	25.0%	16.3%	100%	

Table 1

3274 responses were received, from all states and territories. Responses from the government and non-government sectors were roughly in proportion to the numbers of schools in each sector.

All the questions and response data, except for the written responses, are included in Appendix 1.

An optional, open ended free response section was included for those people who wanted to provide additional information or explanation. These open-ended, unstructured responses provided valuable supplementary data.

The responses were sorted by State and by stakeholder group. Contact details were edited out for privacy reasons, as were the identity of schools where strong negative comments were made. Where teachers were named by students, names were removed, although some of the comments themselves were included. Several comments contained expletives, and these have been omitted. Typographical errors have been largely corrected in the published version.

Although the free response section was optional, a significant number of parents and languages teachers did take the opportunity to add a comment. Some made very lengthy submissions. A large number of people left contact details only, expressing a willingness to provide extra comment either via email or telephone if required. To date these people have not been called upon for extra information. As can be read in the comment documents, many people expressed their appreciation to ACSSO for sponsoring the study and for the opportunity to provide input to what they see as an important issue for Australian education.

Note also that people self-selected the section of the survey that they chose to answer. It was evident that some people were both language teachers and parents. In an anonymous web based survey of this nature it was also possible for a member of one group to act as an "imposter", by completing another section of the survey. This was only evident in one case, where it would seem that a student accessed the Principal's survey, and added some comments – these of course were disregarded.

Written responses grouped according to State/Territory, and by stakeholder group are included in Appendices 2 -9.

Table 2 provides data on the number of written responses:

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Total
Parents	39	57	3	71	21	19	57	57	324
Students	10	53	0	57	23	38	55	53	289
Lang. Teachers	15	69	5	104	63	23	141	69	489
Principals	6	26	2	17	11	5	39	26	132
Lang. Advisors	1	4	2	12	5	4	6	4	38
Tert. Lang Teachers	2	3	0	14	2	2	9	3	35
Total	73	212	12	275	125	91	307	212	1307

Table 2

About this report

This report is structured around the National Statement for Languages Education and the National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools [4]. The Statement and Plan are reproduced in their entirety in this report, being interposed throughout. Part 1 relates to the National Statement, whilst Part 2 relates to the National Plan.

This research concerns languages education in mainstream government and non-government primary and secondary schools. It did not attempt to collect data on views relating to community language schools or to indigenous languages. It was decided at the outset that these specific areas were worthy of further research in their own right, and that adding these extra layers of complexity into the research would not yield particularly meaningful results given the structure and the methodology employed. Indeed, two projects are being funded by DEST on community and indigenous languages.

Where the study collected data on any aspect of the Statement and Plan, it is inserted adjacent to the relevant section which appears in grey panels. Recommendations appear in both Parts 1 and 2 of the report, mainly at the end of sections.

Two types of table are included in the report. The first summarises the quantitative data, and the second the frequency of particular responses gleaned from the open-ended responses. The quantitative responses are coded as follows:
Pa = Parent St = Student LT = Language Teacher P = Principal LA = Language Advisor TL = Tertiary Language Educator

The numbers in each column represent the aggregated percentage of responses that fell in the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories, rounded to the closest whole number. A full listing of questions and all responses can be seen in Appendix 1.

Note that for the purposes of this summary "Don't Know" and "Neutral" responses have been ignored. Tertiary Language educators in particular used the "Don't Know" response in relation to a number of school based issues. Similarly parents and students used this response for some issues that were beyond their immediate experience.

Caution needs to be taken in trying to interpret the data too finely. Whilst Appendix 1 provides all data broken down by participant group and

[4] National statement for languages education in Australian schools: national plan for languages education in Australian schools 2005 – 2008. MCEETYA. 2005

State/Territory location, scrutiny of this data reveals that the numbers become too small to reach meaningful conclusions about the views of sub-groups. It is more realistic to confine any interpretations and conclusions to participant groups as a whole, not their location or other sub-grouping.

Caution should also be exercised when attempting to interpret student responses. Students ranged from Year 5 through to Year 12, so the spread in maturity was extremely broad. It cannot be claimed that the student responses in any way represented a proper statistical sample, but despite this it is possible to identify some common trends in their thinking about languages, especially on issues of engagement and choice.

Similarly, the open ended responses are taken at face value, and any particular individual viewpoint is subjective. The research did not have the resources to check the validity of the written responses, although it does report on patterns and trends by counting the frequency of particular issues raised by participants. As this section of the survey was "unprompted", it is reasonable to assume that where participants raised similar issues, then the issue in question was real rather than idiosyncratic.

The first draft of this report will be placed on the ACSSO languages website. Interested parties are invited to comment on the report as part of a validation exercise. These responses will be incorporated into the report, or adjustments will be made, before the final version is published.

Part 1: Implications for the National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools

Purpose and nature of languages education

Purpose and nature of languages education

Ministers of Education are committed to the vision of quality languages education for all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country. We believe that through learning languages our students and the broader Australian community gain important benefits.

Need for consistent messages

It is pleasing that Ministers of Education are committed to quality languages education, and are united in this quest. Consensus at this level is an important step in any ambitious education plan. Unfortunately this research indicates that their vision is not reflected in all of the words or actions of Federal and State governments when taken collectively, nor is it reflected in the operational leadership within all education authorities.

Whilst a majority of the parents who completed the survey were supportive of school languages programs, they also said that our society and culture generally provided a negative environment for languages to operate. Governments compound society's apathy in both intended and unintended ways. Removal of the NALSAS funding was cited as an example of a negative action, whilst the current Federal government rhetoric about Australian values, the importance of learning English, the attack on multiculturalism, the focus on Australian history along with the basics and standardised testing all give comfort to those who are apathetic or oppose languages education. This is not to argue or question these policies, except to say that when there is a perceived concurrent silence in relation to languages, it is easy for people to conclude that languages are not really on the governmental agenda in any serious way.

It is therefore entirely reasonable to suggest that the global messages that the public receives about language learning from governments are at best, mixed.

Recommendation 1

Education Ministers should attempt to align their respective government policies and public statements in related portfolios with the intent of the National Statement and Plan so that there can be no ambiguity in relation to the strength of their government's commitment towards the value of learning languages in schools.

Stakeholder confidence in governments

Further, the study finds that there is limited confidence in the commitment of education authorities to provide the necessary leadership to support quality language programs, as shown in Table 3 below. This table also shows that people believe that languages do not hold a strong position in the curriculums of the various jurisdictions.

Co-ordination, planning and leadership issues	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
The Education Department/Office in my state/territory provides strong leadership and commitment to Language education programs	14	NA	33	29	35	15
Language teaching holds a strong position in my State/Territory curriculum	23	NA	28	50	16	12

Table 3

It is likely that the lack of confidence in relevant governments and authorities to actually make a difference to this curriculum area is compounded by the fact that languages education has been the subject of a number of studies and reports over the last decade, and there is little to show for the efforts made. For example, the Australian Language and Literacy Council in 1996 highlighted the continuing failure of education systems to deliver quality outcomes.

> *"The Council believes that achieving proficiency in other languages is one of the great learning experiences in the human condition. The key finding of the Council's investigation is that our education systems are consistently failing to deliver any worthwhile proficiency in languages."* [5]

And again in 2002, the Review of the Commonwealth LOTE program argued for an immediate debate and in fact re-examination of the role that languages education should play in the future of our nation.

> *"What is imperative is a decision about how serious we, as a nation, are about becoming a truly multi-lingual society, and the extent to which governments will commit to changing the current situation. These considerations go way beyond deciding the future of the relatively modest funding provided by the Commonwealth government for the LOTE in Schools Programme. They involve a fundamental re-examination of who we are as a people, what we value, and what role we will play in the wider world in the coming decades. Given the lead time required for educational policy changes to produce changes in student outcomes, this debate needs to take place and be resolved sooner rather than later."* [6]

[5] NBEET 19 April 1996 in letter of transmission of the report Language Teachers: The Pivot of Policy to Sen. Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Education, Employment and Youth Affairs.
[6] Review of the Commonwealth LOTE Program, December 2002, pxxi

An analysis of the National Statement and Plan indicates that Ministers have at this stage stopped short of agreeing to any genuine, substantial action to re-vitalise this curriculum area. The following words are used throughout the "action" areas of the Plan – 'consider', 'monitor', 'review', 'explore', 'identify', 'share', and 'promote'. Will the collection of more information make a difference to the current state of languages education? Will further research reveal a magic bullet? Further research may well be necessary, but surely there is plenty of evidence available already about the factors that are hindering languages education, and simply commissioning more research is in reality code for further procrastination. Allocating appropriate resources within the framework of a well developed change management strategy, is surely the first priority.

Table 4 below provides evidence that stakeholders have not yet developed confidence that the National Plan will deliver improved outcomes. An average of just under 10% of participants in this study believe that the MCEETYA Plan will receive sufficient funding to be fully implemented. The only way that this people will be convinced that State and Federal governments are serious in their intentions will be when they see real change happening as opposed to recycling and updating knowledge about problems which are already well known.

Knowledge about and support for the National Plan	**Pa** %	**St** %	**LT** %	**P** %	**LA** %	**TL** %
I am confident that the Commonwealth and the States will provide sufficient resources to fully implement the National Plan	8	NA	13	10	13	4

Table 4

Despite the lack of confidence in actual implementation, the rationale for learning languages as expressed in the National Statement was supported by a large number of written submissions received by as part of this research project. Participants in the study in their own words expressed many of the same sentiments as to the importance of languages education that are found in the MCEETYA statement.

The National Statement itself contains an elegant, clear and contemporary rationale for the value of learning languages. The National Plan however is a cautious, even timid document that steps around the periphery of the problem, looking mainly to gather even more information. This study concludes that stakeholders will not embrace the National Statement in the absence of a fully resourced plan designed to implement a series of actions that fully address all the issues facing languages education. Unless MCEETYA produces such an implementation plan to replace the current one, this study concludes that the National Statement should be formally withdrawn, as it raises community expectations of governments which are clearly not intended to be met.

Recommendation 2

For the Statement to have credibility, it must be supported by a fully funded National Implementation Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2009 – 2012 which replaces the current Plan on its expiry in 2008. In the event that such a plan is not produced, this study recommends that the only honest approach is for the National Statement to be formally withdrawn.

Despite the high level of support for language education from most participants in this study, there was strong evidence that the general public is not "on board", and in fact public support may have declined over the last decade. The public viewpoint will now be examined in greater detail.

The public view about the usefulness and relevance of languages

Table 5 summarises the findings related to how important the public views languages education. All groups, even the parents themselves agree that many other parents do not see the relevance of learning languages. Only 15% of parents believe that Australian people think that Languages form an important part of the school curriculum.

Usefulness and relevance of Languages	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Many Australian parents do not see the relevance of learning a Language	66	NA	76	75	84	67
Many Australian students think that learning a Language is not important	66	32	76	72	80	74
Australian people generally think that Languages are an important part of the school curriculum	15	26	24	32	22	19
Australians as a people do not seem very interested in learning other Languages	66	35	73	60	73	74

Table 5

A very common response from parents was that learning a language should be accorded a much lower priority than learning English.

> *"A number of years ago at our local primary school the subject of LOTE came up in a P&F meeting. I was disturbed by the large number of parents who could see no value in LOTE and felt it was provided at the expense of 'literacy and numeracy'. I think the statement was some thing like - 'What's the point of the children learning another language if they can't read or write in English'"* [7]

Balancing this kind of comment however were a large number which stressed the importance of languages. The following teacher put it very succinctly:

> *"Learning a language in Australia should be seen like learning Maths or English, kicking a ball at recess time or eating lunch - it is a normal part of the curriculum in which every student should participate. It is part of an education for life."* [8]

[7] Parent, Tasmania
[8] Teacher, SA

And a parent said:

> *"For Australians (indeed anyone) to better appreciate and understand other people / nationalities, and to enhance their communication skills, a knowledge of other languages is critical. It doesn't really matter what other languages are learnt because my experience shows that just by simply knowing another language brings a new and positive dimension to communication and understanding of others, because the thought processes tend to be different to your native language."* [9]

However parents often see limited outcomes from the time that their children spend on languages in school:

> *"I feel learning about other countries entire cultures are more important for our children rather than just the language side of it. Bring back Social Studies as it was called in my years at school. Teach the children about the history, leaders, economy etc of a different country each year. My son brings home origami every week from Japanese!"* [10]

The next parent comment picked up on a number of common issues affecting language education, including those relating to its purpose, limited outcomes, lack of continuity, over-stretched teachers, limited school resources, no support for parents and the lack of status of the subject:

> *"I am generally dissatisfied with the teaching of Languages (Indonesian only) at my school:*
> *1. We have one teacher who teachers over 600 pupils each week.*
> *2. As far as I know my children cannot continue the study of Indonesian at a local Catholic high school. There is thus little incentive for the children or parents to regard Indonesian as little more than 'something nice' to fill in part of the day.*
> *3. The emphasis seems to be on culture, songs, dance, food etc. with little evidence of grammar being learned and only basic vocabulary. My son in Year 5 seems to know not much more Indonesian than his brother in Year 3. When I ask them to give me a basic sentence in Indonesian they don't know how to work it out.*
> *4. No Indonesian home work is assigned.*
> *5. No Indonesian readers come home, nor are there many Indonesian language resources in the school library.*
> *6. There is no opportunity for parents who don't themselves know Indonesian to assist their children in learning the language."* [11]

Whilst the National Statement provides an excellent rationale for learning languages, it is far from being embedded widely in the Australian psyche.

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[9] Parent ACT
[10] Parent, WA
[11] Parent, ACT

Learning languages:
- enriches our learners intellectually, educationally and culturally
- enables our learners to communicate across cultures
- contributes to social cohesiveness through better communication and understanding
- further develops the existing linguistic and cultural resources in our community
- contributes to our strategic, economic and international development
- enhances employment and career prospects for the individual.

Our learners are the future of our nation. Developing in them language skills and inter-cultural understanding is an investment in our national capability and a valuable resource. This was recognised in the 1989 National Goals for Schooling, and re-affirmed in the 1999 National Goals, where the Languages (Other Than English)1 learning area was identified as one of the eight key learning areas, and one in which all learners are expected to attain high standards of knowledge, skills and understandings. This National Statement and National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools will further progress towards that goal.

We live in times of rapid change. Information and communication technologies are accelerating the movement of people and ideas across the globe and expanding the range of communities in which people operate. Twenty-first century education needs to engage with, and be responsive to, this changing world. It needs to develop in learners the knowledge, understanding and attributes necessary for successful participation and engagement within and across local, regional and global communities, and in all spheres of activity.

English is Australia's national language. It is also growing as an international language of communication. But English alone is not enough for our learners. In our increasingly multi lingual world, more people speak two languages than one, and contact with speakers of other languages is rapidly growing. Australia must build on its diverse linguistic and cultural environment which is a result of its Indigenous history, geography and migration. Australian Indigenous Languages, the languages of Australia's original inhabitants, are the nation's first languages. There are many active Australian Indigenous languages, dialects, creoles, pidgins and Aboriginal English dialects spoken in Australia. Their importance to Australian Indigenous people and to the broader community is acknowledged and valued. In addition, migration by people from across the globe has brought with it English and more than 150 additional languages. This is Australia's linguistic and cultural landscape. It is a valuable base from which to develop the linguistic capabilities necessary for Australia to be successful in the international community of the 21st century.

Education in a global community brings with it an increasing need to focus on developing inter-cultural understanding. This involves the integration of language, culture and learning. Inter-cultural language learning helps learners to know and understand the world around them, and to understand commonality and difference, global connections and patterns. Learners will view the world, not from a single perspective of their own first language and culture, but from the multiple perspectives gained through the study of second and subsequent languages and cultures. For learners who study their background or heritage language, it provides a strengthened sense of identity. Inter-cultural language learning contributes to the overall education of learners, developing in them the capabilities to:
- communicate, interact and negotiate within and across languages and cultures
- understand their own and others' languages, thus extending their range of literacy skills, including skills in English literacy
- understand themselves and others, and to understand and use diverse ways of knowing, being and doing
- further develop their cognitive skills through thinking critically and analytically, solving problems, and making connections in their learning.

Such capabilities assist learners to live and work successfully as linguistically and culturally aware citizens of the world.

The marginalisation of languages

This study supports the findings of the 2003 Review in relation to a number of unaddressed challenges. Commenting on the Review, Lo Bianco states that the increased levels of activity aimed at making Australia a more bilingual nation starting in the 1980's had run out of steam by 2005.

> *"However, the momentum to make this [provision of universal mainstream language programs] happen, now appears to have stalled and public consensus is eroding. The sad prospect is that languages will again be marginalised in secondary education and become a personal aspiration for individuals, a nostalgic devotion of first generation immigrants, an eroding practice for remote indigenous communities, and a procurement operation for specialist policy sectors, such as national defence planning and the training of diplomats."* [12]

This study confirms Lo Bianco's assertion that 'public consensus is eroding.' Whilst the majority of people surveyed, including parents, support languages education, they also said that they believed that the public as a whole was not convinced of its value. A number of language teachers said that other teachers in their schools are also reflective of an unsupportive community viewpoint. All groups believed that school principals play a crucial role, however there was evidence that the actual support for languages from principals was variable.

This research also supports the findings of the 2002 Review [13] which identified a number of unaddressed challenges. Language programs have expanded, but this expansion has not been underwritten by appropriate resourcing and policy considerations, at the local, state and federal levels. Nor has there been up to this point a plan to address the complex set of societal and attitudinal factors which combine to constrain this curriculum area.

> *"The mediocre state of language learning in this country is not from lack of effort or money being spent. The reality is much more complex, and we would not pretend that there is a simple solution to resolving the intricate interplay between a variety of social, cultural, economic and political forces. The current situation in Australia has taken many years to develop, and is thus likely to take many years to change."* [14]

Why are languages languishing? – a hypothesis

There has been no public debate about languages in recent years. Languages has been overshadowed by other recent government educational initiatives, including values, history, literacy, numeracy, benchmark testing, reporting to parents, common school starting ages, a new Year 12 certificate, common

[12] Lo Bianco. Asian Languages in Australian Schools: Policy Options. Melbourne Asia Policy Papers, No.7. May 2005
[13] Review of the Commonwealth LOTE programme. Erebus Consulting Partners. December 2002
[14] ibid. Pp xiii

curriculum, safe schools and so on. One cannot deny that education has been an active area of policy development, but like the crowded school curriculum, not every subject gets the attention it deserves. Languages suffered at the MCEETYA table following the change of Federal government in 1996, up to around 2005 when it was resurrected as a priority once more.

At a broader political level, the rhetoric around citizenship, Australian values, the importance of English as Australia's national language, migrant integration and the downgrading of multi-culturalism has taken the spotlight away from languages education. It comes as no surprise that many in the population think that learning English is sufficient for the children of today. But not all share this view. According to a Queensland language teacher;

> *"Australia is a multicultural country and therefore a multilingual country. Current attempts by both major parties to stress the importance of English for citizenship purposes ignores the fact that Australia is both multicultural and multilingual and that Australia cannot hope to maintain good intercultural relations with other countries unless it respects those countries enough to communicate in languages other than English as well as fostering intercultural sensibility."* [15]

The above quote exactly encapsulates the intent of the National Statement and why it should be implemented.

Inter-cultural language learning

The focus on the benefits of inter-cultural language learning is essentially a statement of purpose, or hope, rather than one of current reality. Approximately 27% of languages teachers agreed with the proposition that they had difficulty with the concept of inter-cultural language learning. Another 18% expressed neutrality on the issue, indicating that only 55% were fully comfortable with this philosophy. In relation to a broader understanding of the term, educators believed that parents probably did not understand this terminology, and this was confirmed by the parents themselves.

Parent and student involvement in Languages education	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
The term "intercultural language learning" has little meaning for me	47	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
The term "intercultural language learning" is probably not well understood by parents	NA	NA	90	91	90	87

Table 6

These responses serve to remind educators that care must be exercised in using terms such as these when communicating with parents, unless they are carefully explained first. Technical or jargon rich language can be used to marginalise parents from playing a supportive role in their children's

[15] Tertiary language teacher, Queensland

education, and even more so in this area, as many parents will have few language skills themselves..

But more importantly, intercultural language learning actually involves learning a language, and through it, cultural understandings. The reality is however that in many primary schools, language takes a back seat to culture, and parents rightly ask why the cultural aspects cannot simply be taught as part of the Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) programs. This question has more weight when they see very limited language skill outcomes from their children's language lessons.

> *"My daughter's school provides at best 30 minutes a week of LOTE, as the hour is shared with Art. At times it appears that the whole session is taken up with Art rather than Language learning. In Year 3 her language learning is limited to single word or vocabulary responses and is unable to communicate even in a simple sentence. I would have expected some simple conversation skills after three years of language learning."* [16]

Usefulness and relevance of Languages	**Pa** %	**St** %	**LT** %	**P** %	**LA** %	**TL** %
The best way to learn about another culture is through learning a Language	63	59	89	59	74	92

Table 7

Table 7 shows that language teachers have much more confidence than parents, students and principals in the role of languages as a vehicle for teaching about different cultures.

A recommendation concerning intercultural language learning is included in Part 2 of this report when the topic is revisited.

The relationship between languages and English

The relationship between learning English and learning other languages is an area where there is little consensus. Whilst the National Statement argues that literacy skills in English will be enhanced through learning other languages, many parents are yet to be convinced. This does not mean that they are right; it simply means that they have not established this relationship in their own minds.

Usefulness and relevance of Languages	**Pa** %	**St** %	**LT** %	**P** %	**LA** %	**TL** %
Learning other languages is not particularly useful, because English is now spoken so widely around the world	56	17	NA	12	NA	NA
Learning a Language helps with learning English	65	40	97	75	84	84

Table 8

Whilst 65% of parents said that learning a language assists with learning English, 56% also agreed with the proposition that a proficiency in English

[16] Parent, Victoria

was sufficient. When taken with the written comments where a significant number of parents took the view that languages should be taught only if students were first competent in English, it would appear that large numbers of parents fail to see a link between the two. It should also be noted that only 40% students saw the link between learning English and other languages.

> *"I think there is a problem with Languages in that their links to Literacy and how they help improve the Literacy skills of students is not understood and recognised".* [17]

So whilst 97% of Languages teachers say that learning a language helps with learning English, are they making the necessary classroom links? Can they make the links? Or are they teaching something which is fundamentally different from the way English is currently taught and the links are heavily disguised?

Pursuing this line a little further, a number of respondents argued that the study of languages would be made easier if English was taught in a more formal way – grammar, spelling, sentence construction and so on. Others said that when a language is taught formally, students are exposed to valuable literacy learning because this is not available in English classes! This begs the obvious question – is there a mismatch between the pedagogy of teaching English and that of teaching other languages? Perhaps the parents are half right when they say that English should be taught first? Can students be expected to learn the structure of other languages when their own remains a mystery to them?

This report is aware that a NALSAS funded project [18] explored the links between language learning and English literacy. A pamphlet was published outlining these benefits. If this project was a genuine strategy to share the information with the general public, in a convincing way, it is clear that much more needs to be done. The issue of a public education campaign to promote the benefits of learning languages will be explored later in this report.

Recommendation 3

The correlation between literacy in English and learning other languages needs to be made explicit. Language teachers and English teachers should ensure that the pedagogy used in English is consistent with, or at least overlaps with, the pedagogies used in languages classes.

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[17] Teacher, Qld

[18] A Literature Search and Analysis of the Benefits of Learning a Languages Other than English to Literacy Development in English, a report prepared by Simpson Norris International in conjunction with the Centre for Learning, Change and Development, Murdoch University, for the Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002

How to ramp up languages nationally?

National developments

Quality languages education is not yet part of the learning experience of all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country. The challenge that must now be addressed is how best to further integrate quality languages education into the mainstream curriculum, and into program delivery by all schools.

A real commitment to languages is necessary

The statement that "quality languages education is not yet part of the learning experience of all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country" is strongly supported by this research. A number of the factors working against this aim were identified. Many of these factors have not changed over the last decade, and are likely to have been evident over a much longer period of time. This is not to say that there are not some bright spots on the languages landscape. Language education in some schools, in both government and non-government sectors, works very well, enjoying strong support from entire school communities. Unfortunately, the lessons learned from these bright spots, if they have been learned, have not been translated or applied more broadly. The reason for this is open to conjecture. If governments have the will, resources can be found and plans can be enacted. Despite the Ministers' statement prefacing the National Statement and Plan, it would appear that governments over the past decade have simply not developed a level of commitment that is necessary to drive any worthwhile change in this curriculum area.

National level strategies	Frequency
Develop a national/state **government commitment** to languages, multilingual multicultural society (from top, PM down)	42

Table 9

Table 9 indicates that the study received 42 written comments suggesting that the very first step necessary to drive change was to obtain top level commitment, including that of the Prime Minister, in relation to supporting the teaching of languages within a framework of the needs of the nation and its people. Tangible evidence of a real commitment would be if recommendation 1 was actually implemented.

Languages education for all students is a relatively new concept in the history of Australian schooling. While the study of languages has long been an established part of the curriculum in many secondary schools, it was generally seen as an area of study for the academically able. This view changed significantly in the 1990s when most states and territories introduced languages programs in primary schools as part of their commitment to the National Goals. Since then, a great deal of development has occurred in terms of numbers of programs, numbers of languages learners and the number of languages taught. In 2003, the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) undertook a Review of Languages Education in Australian Schools. The Review found that nationally:

- approximately 50% of students were learning a language in mainstream schools
- there were 146 languages being taught in both mainstream and non-mainstream school settings. This included:
  – 103 languages (including 68 Australian Indigenous Languages) taught in government, Catholic and independent schools
  – 69 languages taught through after hours ethnic/community languages schooling.
- six languages emerged as the most commonly taught. These were, in order of enrolment numbers: Japanese, Italian, Indonesian, French, German and Chinese. More than 90% of languages learners were learning one of these languages.

Expansion of languages programs – outcomes lag behind inputs

There can be no denying that there has been significant growth in the inputs to language education over the past 20 or so years. In the words of Professor Joseph Lo Bianco:

> *"Among the nations of the Anglo-American world, Australia stands out for its energetic efforts to develop a comprehensive and ambitious approach to language education policy. Since the mid-1980s, there has been massive growth in investment in language programs and language study."* [19]

However the figures quoted in the National Statement and Plan on the penetration of languages in the curriculum give an incomplete picture of what is really happening in schools, in terms of outcomes. To say that 50% of students were learning a language in mainstream schools is an overstatement when one considers that many students have very few skills after being exposed to a "language" program. Can a program that offers a cultural experience with a few pieces of incidental vocabulary included be rightfully called a "language program"? Can students who are exposed to such a program rightfully be described as "learning a language"? Can it be claimed that students have "learned a language", when they know only a few words and cannot engage in even the most basic of conversations?

The picture in schools is one of extreme variability in the quality of language programs. In describing their answer to the level of satisfaction with languages programs in their jurisdiction, one languages advisor said:

[19] Lo Bianco. Asian Languages in Australian Schools: Policy Options. Melbourne Asia Policy Papers, No.7. May 2005

"The final question says, 'Are you satisfied with the quality of Languages Education?' In schools where the program is well provided for, e.g. qualified teacher and adequate time allocation for lessons, the answer would be 'yes'. But in schools where the administration has opted not to teach languages, the answer is 'no'". [20]

The Review also found that the expansion of languages programs had created significant challenges which still need to be addressed. These include:
- the need for appropriately qualified and trained teachers
- continuity in languages learning within schools, and from primary to secondary levels and beyond
- adequate time allocations
- supportive timetabling practices
- resourcing
- whole school commitment.

There is also an ongoing need to convey to the broader community the real and achievable benefits of effective languages education for all learners. The Review proposed that stronger collaboration at the national level was needed to further enhance the quality of the language learning experience and to make it a reality for all learners. Ministers of Education endorsed this call for a renewed national effort by agreeing to the development of a new National Statement for Languages Education, and an initial four year National Plan for Languages Education.

This research agrees with the viewpoint expressed in the National Statement that there are are unaddressed challenges for language education in relation to adequate numbers of trained teachers, continuity between sectors, time allocations, timetabling practices, resourcing and the degree of whole school commitment. It also confirms the need for a far reaching public awareness campaign. These challenges will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

[20] Languages Advisor, Victoria

Implications for jurisdictions and schools

Implications for jurisdictions and schools

In order to realise the vision of quality languages education for all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country, jurisdictions and schools need to take into account matters relating to quality and provision.

Quality programs and quality teachers

Quality programs depend on quality teachers. Quality teachers need supportive program conditions and a professional working environment. They also need to be well-trained and have opportunities to participate in ongoing professional learning, which focuses on the development of their linguistic, cultural and pedagogical proficiencies.

Qualified and trained teachers

A shortage of language teachers remains a major impediment to the realisation of strong, universal languages programs. Replacing teachers who are transferred, take leave or resign is a challenge for schools and jurisdictions. Sometimes a new language is started simply because a qualified teacher of the former language cannot be found. An ACT parent said:

> *"The key issue facing my child with respect to learning languages is the lack of qualified and experienced teachers. All the children at my child's school suffer from this issue. The whole area of language teaching becomes too hard for the school as they cannot get or keep language teachers for more than a term or two before they move on to something else (this is not an issue in any other core subject)".* [21]

When schools in urban areas such as Canberra find difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers, it is not surprising that the problems are magnified in rural regions.

Language teacher issues	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Some Language teachers in my state are poorly qualified	NA	NA	51	NA	66	66
Language teachers at my school are well qualified	50	NA	NA	74	NA	NA

Table 10

Table 10 indicates that around half of languages teachers agree that other language teachers in their state are not well qualified, with language advisors and tertiary teachers recording even stronger agreement. Whilst 74% of principals said that language teachers at their own schools were well

[21] Parent, ACT

qualified, the fact that 26% could not agree with the proposition indicates that the issue of qualifications is real.

Consistency of quality is also an issue. Whilst there is no suggestion that the range in quality of languages teachers is any different from that of other teachers, this factor may be more crucial in the languages area because the numbers are small. Sometimes only one teacher carries responsibility for the entire languages program of a school. At best it will be only a small team. Young language teachers rarely enjoy the same level of collegial support available to teachers in other subject areas, especially if they are placed in more remote locations. Professional networks are harder to establish away from the cities and provincial towns.

Morale of language teachers

Table 11 confirms that the morale of language teachers is not high. The dynamics of the factors which influence morale are complex, and may affect different people in different ways. It is reasonable to assume that any initiatives that value and support language teachers and their work will have a positive influence on morale.

Language teacher issues	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Morale is high amongst my Language teaching colleagues, in both schools and Universities, regarding the future of Languages	NA	NA	31	NA	5	13

Table 11

Recommendation 4

The low morale of language teachers needs to be acknowledged and steps should be taken at to address this at national, state, regional and school levels where appropriate. A designated "Year of Languages Education" as flagged in the Plan would go some way towards addressing this issue, as would the identification and implementation of a range of employment incentives directed towards supporting these teachers.

Learning a language takes time

Cumulative nature of languages learning

Learning languages is a cumulative process. The development of deep understanding and language proficiency requires extensive engagement over a prolonged period of time. This means that sustained effort is essential, with frequent and regular lessons, appropriate time allocations, and with schools working together to improve continuity across the levels of schooling. Learners who begin languages study in preschool and the early years of schooling, and those who bring with them knowledge of other languages, are provided with a strong foundation for future languages learning.

Co-ordination across primary and secondary levels

Ensuring continuity in languages education is a persistent, all pervasive and largely unsolved issue. Language discontinuities exist between different levels of schooling and even within the same school over a period of time. Very few people believe that the transition between primary school and high school is handled well in the government and catholic schooling sectors. Where a school spans both primary and secondary levels, such as occurs in a number of independent schools, especially where teaching staff are shared, this structure is conducive to much better coordination.

Co-ordination, planning and leadership issues	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Languages are well coordinated between primary and high schools in my State	15	NA	24	23	8	4
In my experience, the Language I learnt at primary school continued on to my secondary school	NA	41	NA	NA	NA	NA

Table 12

Regional planning

The anecdotal evidence in this study suggests that there is little regional planning and dialogue in relation to languages education, especially in rural areas. A picture is painted of individual teachers working in isolation in their own school, or working across several schools, justifying their own existence to colleagues and principals but largely operating in a context devoid of wider professional support and planned language provision. One teacher puts it this way, when describing his/her situation:

> *"There is no continuity between Language programmes from primary to high school. Many students have to change languages. Lack of qualified teachers. No district plan for languages - the language taught depends on who they can get to teach. No consultation with high school teachers from feeder schools. Not acknowledged by District Office at all. No useful PD provided by District Office. Being in the country we are very isolated and have little access to good PD."* [22]

[22] Teacher, WA

Recommendation 5

Each jurisdiction needs to audit the effectiveness of its regional planning and provision in schools and establish an action plan to address deficiencies.

Adequate and well structured time allocations

There are two issues in relation to the time allocated by schools to languages education. They are the quantum of time, measured in say minutes per week, and the way this time is organised or timetabled by schools. Whilst the amount of time may or may not be mandated by education authorities, it is clear from this study that mandating does not necessarily mean that this amount of time will be actually allocated by individual schools. The study found a high level of dissatisfaction with time allocations.

Challenges for Language teaching	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
My school allocates sufficient time for students to properly learn a Language	NA	47	46	44	NA	NA
Schools do not generally allocate sufficient time to properly learn a Language	NA	NA	NA	NA	80	91

Table 13

A teacher from Tasmania echoes the views of many others;

> *"I believe students learn languages better if they learn it often - one lesson of 40 minutes a week is not enough if they are to memorise vocabulary, script and so on; I spend much of my lesson time in memorising activities, so that it takes a long time before I can move on to a new topic. We need more time for songs, games, and culture activities."* [23]

Secondly, the way time is organised has a major impact on the success of language learning, which requires constant practice. Being able to converse in a second language is one of those skills that will disappear if not used often. Regular and frequent language lessons are therefore the key. Even if a school can only offer 90 minutes of languages a week, 3 X 30 minute lessons are better than 1 X 90 minute lesson. Fewer lessons make continuity more vulnerable, as a single interruption can halt all learning for a week.

The other issue in relation to time is longitudinal continuity. Commonly, secondary schools organise their curriculum structures around semester units. Within this structure, students may be required to study a language for one semester and then something else for the alternate semester. Such models also bring the 'use it or lose it' principle into play.

[23] Teacher, Tasmania

"LOTE is taught in yr 8 for 1 term, and then it can be picked up for a semester in yr 9 and 2 semesters in year 10. No wonder there are so few students. There is no continuity. The LOTE teachers are part-time, through choice and lack of language classes and are very demoralised." [24]

A recommendation on time allocations is made in Part 2

Supportive time-tabling practices

In addition to the timetabling practices mentioned above another major impediment to the uptake of languages in secondary schools is that of competition from other curriculum areas. Languages are often timetabled against attractive options such as arts or technology subjects. Schools then may overlay an element of compulsion, requiring for example that students choose one semester of a language in their first two years of secondary school. A common outcome of such arrangements is that students feel that they have been forced into a "compulsory elective" that is not of their choosing. This is a direct result of languages being treated quite differently from say mathematics, English and science.

"Languages often compete at high schools as a choice - where they are offered against many of the subjects seen as much more exciting - eg home economics, dance, drama. While languages can be exciting and fascinating, to be successful does involve real commitment to core information - the content is important as well as the process." [25]

Whole school commitment to languages education

Whole school commitment to languages education
Effective languages programs require whole school support, particularly from school leaders. The involvement of community members, as well as collaboration between languages teachers and colleagues in other key learning areas, influences the extent to which languages are valued as an integral part of the mainstream curriculum.

Why a whole school commitment to languages education is important?

The study received a large number of comments relating to the support that is necessary for languages to flourish in schools. Many teachers mentioned the role of the principal, who can shape the opinions of other staff and parents. But the issue goes beyond the role of the principal, as there are clear educational benefits for children when teaching staff work together in a co-

[24] Teacher, Qld
[25] Teacher, SA

operative way. The first comment below was fairly typical of the frustrations experienced by secondary school teachers when they find themselves in a school which drains them of energy through the indifference of colleagues and school leaders.

> *"I am somewhat dissatisfied in my job due to various happenings in my school - firstly we are constantly needing to explain the relevance of LOTE to colleagues and management. Secondly, there is little support for staff in the ongoing discipline of students who constantly act up in LOTE classes. Whilst I love teaching LOTE, I find it difficult to get myself 'up' for every day, when many students do not see the relevance of it, due to the attitudes of other teachers, their parents and friends. It is also difficult to sustain a solid program with insufficient time allocation."* [26]

The second comment below describes a situation where language education simply hums along because of the value and esteem it holds within the school community.

> *"I LOVE my job as a language teacher in my school. I teach in the Junior School from Pre-primary to Year 6, and am supported by the parents, Junior school staff as well as the Junior School Principal and Headmistress of the College. I am in constant discussions with class teachers to make sure my lessons are relevant and integrated with class inquiries and I also work closely with the music specialist. I use technology to modernise my methods and make my lessons relevant to the 21st Century. At the same time this allows for Sounds to be included to written presentations. Although we create our own resources eg books, flashcards etc technology also allows us to create material for viewing on CDRom and interactive games that are used at different levels/years. The special needs and extension teachers have also collaborated with me, to work with groups of students requiring "rewarding" extensions for a term eg Philosophical discussions in French etc ending with a special breakfast at a French bakery for example where French was again spoken throughout the duration of the excursion.*
> *I feel very supported by our Junior School Head for resources that I feel necessary or new language programmes or outings or any material that I feel is essential to stimulate my students".* [27]

[26] Secondary school teacher, Victoria
[27] Junior school teacher, WA

Where do principals stand on Languages?

Of the 268 principals who participated in this study, 38% said that they were very satisfied with the language programs in their schools, 33% were somewhat satisfied and the remainder were neutral or dissatisfied. These results are broadly in line with the findings of the 2002 APPA Review into The Place of Languages Other than English in the Primary Schools. [28]

> *"Some two thirds of primary principals who have chosen to undertake LOTE in their schools are positive about their programs. While sharing similar concerns with others in the sample, most have opted to continue with LOTE. Their positive responses indicate there is a place for LOTE in primary schools.*
> *Approximately one third of principals' overall impressions are not as positive about their local programs. These principals indicated a preference to opt out of LOTE in the future."* [29]

It is likely that the group of principals who chose to participate in the present study represent a sample that is more supportive of languages than would be the case if all principals were surveyed. Table 14 supports this view, as it shows that 83% of principal respondents said that they were highly supportive of their own school language program, whilst the other groups believed that principals were less committed. Tertiary language teachers and language advisors both held the strong view that school principals were unsupportive of language programs.

Co-ordination, planning and leadership issues	**Pa** %	**St** %	**LT** %	**P** %	**LA** %	**TL** %
My school principal is highly committed to the school's Languages program	45	45	62	83	19	3

Table 14

The APPA report also contained the following statement:

> *"If LOTE is to remain universal for all primary students, then it needs to be universally resourced ensuring equity for all schools, without impacting upon the overall curriculum. Otherwise the pressures of overcrowded curriculum, thinning of resources, access to quality specialists and intermittent programs will continue to erode the value of primary LOTE programs."* [30]

Whilst the attitudes and support of principals are key factors in the provision of quality school language programs, they are not always in control of the

[28] The Place of Languages other than English in the Primary Schools – Perspectives of Australian Primary Principals. APPA. 2002
[29] Ibid.p3
[30] Ibid. p10.

resources that they need, and are pressured by ever increasing curriculum demands and expectations. When a language program changes or dies in a school, it is too easy and convenient to simply blame the principal, without investigating all the other factors that may be in play.

Later this report looks at the need for a program to educate principals about the importance of languages in schools, and supports this suggestion in the National Plan. Notwithstanding this, it will be futile to simply implement such a program and expect principals' attitudes to change, without making it explicit that there will be extra resources to support language programs, in such a way that the National Statement becomes one of reality rather than one of aspiration. Principals need to see the 'colour of the money', and will not be swayed by empty rhetoric.

The way for MCEETYA to obtain widespread support for the National Statement is to formulate an implementation plan along the lines suggested in Recommendation 2 of this report.

Provision of languages

Choice of languages

All languages are equally valid. Learners gain similar social, cognitive, linguistic and cultural benefits, regardless of the language studied. Decisions made by individual jurisdictions and schools regarding the languages to be offered and supported, need to take into account local contexts. Other important factors to consider are availability of teachers and resources, learner background, and continuity of languages learning, especially at transition points in schooling.

Choice of languages

The study addressed the question of European vs Asian languages to see if there were any views on this issue. The results are seen in Table 15 below

Usefulness and relevance of Languages	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Asian Languages are more relevant than European Languages for Australian children	38	13	22	39	36	38

Table 15

As is quite evident, backing for the proposition that Asia languages are more important than European languages receives marginal support.

> *"[I'm] not fussed about Asian versus European languages, although I might soon embark on Chinese myself as I believe we probably all will need to acquire some skill there. All language learning is good per se, even Latin."* [31]

Whilst people generally believed that languages whether from Europe or Asia were equally valued, there was quite strong support expressed for students to be able to choose languages that suited them, rather than being forced into a particular language. We will return to this in Part 2.

[31] Parent, Qld

Other providers need to supplement provision

A range of provision

Mainstream schools alone cannot provide the entire range of languages that learners may wish to study. Providing a wide range of languages is achieved through:

- collaboration among mainstream schools, distance education providers and government schools of languages
- in the case of Australian Indigenous Languages, schools working in partnership with Indigenous communities
- after hours ethnic/community languages schooling.

The study received some 40 written responses advocating a greater use of community resources. Similarly, there was equally strong support for capitalising on new web-based and distance technologies for both teaching and learning and for teacher professional development.

> *"This survey misses one of the key aspects of language teaching and learning that is always overlooked in studies. That is, that language studies cannot exist alone as a subject in the school. Rather, their success occurs when a holisitic approach is applied; classroom language learning, school exchanges and sister schhool relationships, partnerships with community organisations and ethnic communities, and active support for the promotion and realisation of cultural opportunities. Unfortunately, many language teachers are like their colleagues, process workers within their schools who will take advantage of cultural opportunities or connections when they appear, but are unwilling to take the time or make the effort to become involved in external organisations that might sponsor such events or activities."* [32]

Community languages

This research did not examine the provision of community languages per se, although it appears that the reason for a strong preference for expanding rather than limiting the range of languages taught in schools was related to a desire for students to learn community languages. Parents and students indicated that they would like to have more choice in the languages that were available for study at school. A number of responses indicated that this choice should include community languages.

[32] Teacher, Tasmania

Indigenous languages

A distinct and explicit presence for Australian Indigenous Languages

Australian Indigenous Languages have a unique place in Australia's heritage and in its cultural and educational life. For Indigenous learners, they are fundamental to strengthening identity and self-esteem. For non-Indigenous learners, they provide a focus for development of cultural understanding and reconciliation. The choice of which Australian Indigenous Language should be offered requires careful negotiation with Indigenous people. It also requires recognition of protocols related to language ownership, language maintenance and revival; and acknowledgement of the cultural connections and contexts of languages within Australian Indigenous communities.

This research did not attempt to examine issues around indigenous languages, although a number of responses indicated that this was a serious omission in the research design! The parent organisations believe that the issue of indigenous languages is deserving of a research project in its own right.

Part 2: Implications of the National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005 – 2008

Structure of the National Plan

The National Plan is constructed to focus on six major, overlapping strategic areas, or strands.

Measures of effectiveness

Two measures of the effectiveness of the Plan are proposed, being collection of student participation data and the development of sample assessment processes. From the experience of the last decade, participation data by itself is incapable of providing an accurate picture about the reality of what may or may not be occurring in language classrooms. Will the project of developing assessment processes actually be used to inform the interpretation of the participation data? One would expect that the broad outcomes of the current work on languages education will be:

i) greater numbers of students participating in language programs
ii) greater levels of proficiency in speaking, reading and writing in another language
iii) greater appreciation and understanding of the cultures associated with particular languages

Introduction

The National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools provides an overarching framework for State, Territory and Australian Government activities. It affirms the place of languages education in the school curriculum, and describes the purpose and nature of learning languages. This National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools, as an initial four-year Plan for 2005–2008, reflects an agreed commitment by all Ministers of Education to act together to address areas of common concern. It aims to:

- establish long-term directions for languages education
- advance the implementation of high quality and sustainable programs
- maximise collaboration in the use of national, state and territory resources
- provide flexibility in implementation by individual jurisdictions.

The Plan focuses on six nationally agreed inter-dependent strategic areas. These are:

Strand one: Teaching and Learning
Strand two: Teacher Supply and Retention
Strand three: Professional Learning
Strand four: Program Development
Strand five: Quality Assurance
Strand six: Advocacy and Promotion of Languages Learning

At both national and individual jurisdictional level, efforts and resources will focus on the six strategic areas of the Plan, with yearly reports to MCEETYA to outline progress made, and a formal evaluation in the fourth year. The Plan reflects a commitment by Ministers of Education to work in partnership with the key stakeholders in languages education to implement and monitor the Plan. Its effectiveness will be measured through:

- the collection and analysis of student participation data
- the development of national sample assessment processes to determine the quality of student learning outcomes.

Details of the evaluation processes will be developed through national agreement with all jurisdictions.

Clearly, the participation data needs to be supported by data on student achievement outcomes, for any meaningful conclusions to be reached on the success of the National Plan in the future.

The actions formulated to address the six strands of the National Plan are fine as far as they go, but need to be prioritised. The biggest failing of the plan as it currently exists is that there is no requirement for any jurisdiction to actually do anything, except to participate in an exercise where further research and a range of other options are considered. There are no firm and binding plans to actually spend money on implementing initiatives which address the already well known shortcomings of languages education. Until the next steps are identified, publicised and impact on individual schools, scepticism will overshadow any optimism that has been generated to date.

Recommendation 6

MCEETYA needs to prioritise the actions in the Plan, avoiding those pseudo actions where further research is not required. Jurisdictions should direct their funding to these priority areas.

This report will now reflect on those action areas proposed in the Plan where the study is able to make an informed comment.

Strand 1 – Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning

Objective

To strengthen and promote the quality of teaching and learning practices to ensure that all learners in Australian schools have the opportunity to achieve high level outcomes in languages learning.

Underpinning principle

All learners in Australian schools are entitled to participate in quality languages programs and to achieve high standards of knowledge, skills and understandings.

This strand represents the key outcome of the National Plan - an entitlement for every Australian child to participate in high quality programs and to achieve high standards. If this outcome is to be achieved, the current inconsistencies in teaching and learning that are evident across the country need to be addressed. Currently, there is ample evidence to support the assertion that quality teaching and learning **does** take place in many schools across the country. The challenge is to replicate this good practice in all schools, both government and non-government, in all states.

Actions

- Develop strategies to increase participation in languages learning in the compulsory and non-compulsory years of schooling.
- Develop and implement a web-based strategy to disseminate information about relevant and recent Australian and international research and development and materials development, to support information exchange and to encourage ongoing collaboration.
- Share information about effective teaching practices, inter-cultural language learning and classroom based research, and promote through the web-based strategy.
- Consider areas for further research and development to provide opportunities for ideas and new programs to be developed and tested in challenging environments, to embed change at the local levels and to share the experience nationally. Areas to consider include:
  - the pedagogical and assessment implications of inter-cultural language learning
  - languages learning and literacy development
  - factors affecting long-term gains in languages learning
  - impact of program conditions and working environment on teaching and learning
  - factors which inhibit successful languages education
  - transition and continuity from primary to secondary schooling
  - the unique demands of teaching and learning in after hours ethnic/community languages schools
  - the unique demands of teaching and learning Australian Indigenous Languages
  - the contribution of Australian Indigenous Languages to community led maintenance and revival of Australian Indigenous Languages and cultures
  - current provision of languages at senior secondary level
  - languages learning in the early years of schooling
  - languages and vocational education
  - use of information and communication technologies in languages classrooms.

Increasing Participation

Table 16 below provides a snapshot of views about student target groups for languages. Note that there was relatively weak support for the notion that students who struggle with English should be exempt from learning another language. This is despite the relatively large number of comments received from parents who took the view that schools should "teach English first". The study also received a number of suggestions in relation to students with special needs. In line with the fact that the term "special needs" covers a very wide spectrum of students, the sensible strategy is for schools to look at each individual case on its merits. Anecdotal evidence provided from a number of teachers cited cases of particular students with learning difficulties enjoying and making good gains in language classes.

In relation to whether languages should be compulsory or optional, the table indicates that students are the weakest supporters of compulsion, for both primary and secondary levels. One reason for this response is likely to be their experience of classroom behavioural problems. For example:

> *"I think that Lote is lost on a lot of people that don't want to do it and in turn they screw around in class and make it harder for the ones who want to learn. It should definitely be optional as 95% of students from Year 7 to*

Year 9 don't want to do it and they should be able to choose other classes."[33]

On the other hand, many students accept that languages are an important part of the curriculum, but want more internal choice. Given the resource implications of providing more languages and therefore more choice, it is hard to see these suggestions being realised, however it is important to understand where the students are coming from.

"I personally don't like the subject and find it hard to grasp. It would be a lot better if the students got the chance to choose whether or not to do the subject. And then they should also have a bigger range of language subjects, therefore if you're not interested in the one, you have another choice instead of being forced to do something you don't want to." [34]

Should all students study Languages? Should it be compulsory?	**Pa** %	**St** %	**LT** %	**P** %	**LA** %	**TL** %
Students who struggle with English should not have to learn another language	20	33	10	23	19	2
Special needs students should be withdrawn or exempted from Language classes	16	20	NA	22	16	4
Language learning should be compulsory in every primary school	67	42	81	60	66	82
Languages should be compulsory for all high school students in the junior years	66	42	75	65	74	91

Table 16

Whilst a majority of parents, teachers and principals believe that languages should be compulsory in primary schools and in the early years of high school, support for this proposition falls well short of 100%. Their responses are most likely tempered by the reality of the present situation. For example, some parents see low level outcomes, and rightly question why languages should be given any priority. Some secondary school teachers feel that it would be better for their students if they had not been exposed to languages in their primary schools. Some principals probably believe that teacher quality and supply issue, already stretched to the limit, would not cope with any increase in participation.

There is evidence that simply making languages compulsory at high school can be counterproductive. For example, a significant number of NSW principals made comments along the lines of the one below:

"Languages learning in NSW has been bedevilled by the decision of the Carr government to make it compulsory for all Stage 4 students. This has led to classes full of students with no interest and no intention of continuing the study. It has also led to the "dumbing down" of courses to

[33] Student, Victoria
[34] Student, Victoria

a level of developing some cultural appreciation of the society taking precedence for students over learning the language." [35]

The NSW experience is clearly one of top level policy outstripping the capacities of schools and the NSW DET to deliver quality outcomes.

Table 16 provides evidence of the range of thinking evident when people were faced with the question of how to strengthen languages education. One area of consensus, and supported in table 17 is that a strong majority of people believe that it is best to start learning a language in the early years of schooling.

Languages target group strategies	**Frequency**
Make Languages **optional** at high school	42
Make Languages **compulsory** at high school (like other KLA's) (some say to Yr 12)	31
Make Languages compulsory but provide **internal choice** in high school	15
Start teaching Languages in the **early childhood** years	48
Make Languages **optional in primary school** or don't teach it at all Note: large numbers of parents say "teach basics first"	14
Mandate Languages in primary school and specify adequate time allocation	15

Table 17

Recommendation 7

Reducing the extent of compulsion would send wrong messages about the value of languages education. It is recommended that schools and jurisdictions maintain the current levels of compulsion, and work on increasing the quality of provision.

Which languages and how many?

Sixty eight comments were received which were in favour of increasing the range of languages taught in Australian schools. Only seven called for a reduction in the number of languages. Further analysis of this finding would indicate that people were not really calling for an expansion of the number of languages taught nationally – it is more a question of expanding the range of languages available in their own local schools.

Which Languages should be taught and how many?	**Frequency**
Increase range of Languages offered (more choice) Offer existing languages more widely – some comments reflect individual wishes and circumstances, including a desire for greater access to community languages	49
Rationalise (reduce) range of Languages offered	7
Make **Spanish** more widely available	10
Introduce **AUSLAN**	6
Introduce **Esperanto**	3

Table 18

[35] Principal, NSW

The quantitative data in Table 19 below also indicates that there is quite weak support for the proposition that the number of languages taught in schools should be reduced.

Knowledge about and support for the National Plan	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Australian schools should reduce the number of Languages on offer in order to improve learning continuity between schools and the supply of teachers	29	NA	25	35	40	17

Table 19

Recommendation 8

Jurisdictions and schools should not reduce the number of languages that are currently taught. They should consider increasing the range in individual schools to provide students with greater choices, particularly in the junior high school years.

Use of web based strategies to share and disseminate information

The study elicited a number of responses where teachers referred the research to various web-sites, other research, programs and curriculum activities. It is evident that a considerable amount of information is already available electronically, and it would be of benefit is the various sources were collated and published. The parent organisations sponsoring this research intend to develop a languages web site which will add to the resource base.

Resources available for Language teaching	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Access to good quality ICT is a problem for Language teaching	NA	NA	69	NA	61	55
I am convinced of the value of ICT as an appropriate tool for learning Languages	NA	NA	83	NA	83	63

Table 20

Whilst table 20 is somewhat tangential to the above finding, it demonstrates that language teachers value the use of new technology in teaching and learning. They are therefore highly likely to use it for their own professional learning. The finding that 69% of language teachers agree that access to Information and Communications is a problem, should be interpreted literally That is, access to the infrastructure (specialist rooms, hardware and high speed broadband) is currently a resource issue in relation to classroom delivery. This may well be a problem that affects other subject areas, but one that should and can be addressed. The important finding is that language teachers know and understand the value of web-based learning.

Recommendation 9

Education jurisdictions should publish information about language teaching and learning electronically, and share this information with other jurisdictions and schools across state borders and between government and non-government schooling sectors.

Inter-cultural language learning

The study reports on two direct findings related to intercultural language learning (ILL). The first was that most respondents believed that parents would have little idea of the meaning of this term. This was reported on in Part 1 of this report. The point needs to be re-emphasised; If ILL is indeed meant to be a pedagogical centre-piece, then surely it is incumbent on schools to be in a position to communicate its meaning to parents in simple language, so that they can understand the intent of the curriculum.

The second direct finding relates to the ease/difficulty that language teachers have in implementing ILL.

Intercultural language learning	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Language teachers often struggle to effectively educate students about intercultural knowledge	NA	NA	27	NA	53	56

Table 21

Language teachers were asked to respond to the proposition that "I am struggling to effectively educate students about inter-cultural knowledge". Whilst only 27% of languages teachers agreed with the proposition, the level of disagreement was only 45%. This would indicate that a sizable minority of teachers are not totally comfortable with ILL. Over half of language advisors and tertiary educators agreed with the same proposition. There is a strong indication that the work on developing ILL skills in teachers is unfinished business.

A more indirect insight into the status of ILL comes from the apparent lack of helpful curriculum documentation in relation to languages education, especially in primary schools. The following two comments are pertinent:

> *"Education authorities have very little idea (or interest) in what is actually taught, especially at primary level."* [36]

and,

> *"The curriculum frameworks need to be tighter and more demanding in the junior levels. A detailed 'best practice' curriculum needs to be provided for teachers to work from. Students need to have access to books and texts to take home and in some cases keep (Mine have brought nothing home in seven years). Resources should include recorded materials and the ability for any child to access on the internet."* [37]

[36] Parent, Victoria
[37] Parent, Victoria

A number of participants expressed concern at the quality of the current documentation supporting the delivery of language programs.

Languages curriculum strategies	Frequency
Develop **curriculum documentation** - make it more **useful** to teachers. Clarify purpose first – how much culture, how much language? Increase accountability of how and what is taught.	22

Table 22

Twenty two comments were received on the inadequacy of curriculum documentation. It is evident that primary school teachers are largely required to invent their own programs. Consequently, it seems that the purpose of language education is not clearly defined or documented, program quality is highly variable, and that there are few accountability mechanisms in place to monitor student achievement standards. Some schools concentrate on culture, others on language acquisition. If the curriculum is so highly teacher - centric, is it any wonder that continuity suffers when teachers move on?
A further indication that the purpose of ILL is not necessarily being reflected in student learning is encapsulated in the comment of a Western Australian teacher.

> *"I am all for "intercultural language learning" but I feel that in the push to support this we have lost sight of one of the important more "academic" aims of LOTE programmes, and that is to be able to atually produce students who can leave high school with an extremely functional and useful grasp of a second language. A student being only able to remember the word "Konnichi wa" at a student reunion or happens to know a few origami tricks or how to make sushi in 10 easy steps is really not an example of a successful language programme. If we really want students to believe that languages will help them in the future job market, then our programmes and forms of delivery need to become a whole lot more rigorous and academically demanding. "Cultural understandings" and a broader world view are of course are very important, but this should not be the duty solely of LOTE departments around Australia!"* [38]

Intercultural language learning as an approach seems to be giving unintended legitimisation to programs where the language components are being downgraded.

Recommendation 10

Inter-cultural language learning needs to be clearly defined and steps should be taken to inform all stakeholders just what is and what is not legitimate to be included in this approach. Jurisdictions and schools should assist languages teachers by clarifying curriculum documentation and producing sample courses (including resource lists) for teachers to follow.

[38] Teacher, WA

Languages learning and literacy development

The links between English literacy and learning other languages was canvassed in Part 1 of this report, and should form part of a media campaign which will be discussed later. See also recommendation 3

Impact of program conditions and working environment on teaching and learning - teacher release and lack of classrooms

Two findings are particularly relevant here. Firstly, in primary schools across the country, a very common practice is for the Language teacher to provide release time for the classroom teacher. This practice seems to introduce a whole range of problems, the most significant being that the Language teacher is often seen as in itinerant visitor, not embedded into the culture of the school. The following two comments go to the heart of this matter:

> *"I feel that the LOTE classes are more disorganised and less well behaved because most of the LOTE teachers are only there part time, a bit like a relief teacher. If the LOTE teacher were an integral part of the school, or an existing staff member who was qualified to teach LOTE then it could be done as a whole school, embedded in all areas of learning on a day to day basis."* [39]

and,

> *"The time allocated to Language is often non-contact time for homeroom teachers - this cements its separateness - there seem to be little continuity between LOTE and literacy more generally."* [40]

Languages delivery strategies	Frequency
Change the model of language delivery in primary schools whereby language teachers provide mainstream teachers with release time.	27

Table 23

Twenty seven written responses referred to the inadequacy of this particular staffing model.

So a common problem in primary schools is that languages teachers and mainstream teachers do not interact. The language teacher comes in and the mainstream teacher goes to a staffroom. There is little opportunity to discuss links with other school programs, pedagogy, individual students, assessment, or any of the other things that are so important in all other curriculum areas. This factor alone makes it very difficult for schools to develop a whole school approach to languages education.

[39] Teacher, WA
[40] Teacher, Qld

Recommendation 11

Jurisdictions and schools should look for creative ways to abandon the model whereby language teachers provide release time for other teachers in primary schools, as this practice places major constraints in implementing an integrated approach to languages education at this level.

The second issue that seriously impacts on good language learning in many schools is associated with the former. The language teacher occupies the mainstream teacher's classroom as a temporary visitor. This makes it especially difficult to construct a languages rich environment – seating plans may not be disturbed, posters on walls may be discouraged, the blackboard may be full and not to be touched; the list goes on.

> *"When the Courier Mail reported on LOTE and interviewed Principals of State Primary schools what stayed in my mind was the general negative attitude of these educators to languages. There are LOTE primary school teachers who do NOT have their own LOTE classroom (one teacher held some of her classes outside), who have to battle to get one, or who 'visit' a classroom 'owned' by a primary school teacher (no posters please!) and are regarded with almost suspicion. There are primary school teachers who have such a narrow vision of the role of LOTE that they see the primary LOTE teacher as someone below their own aura."* [41]

Recommendation 12

Wherever possible, schools should make concerted efforts to provide languages teachers with their own dedicated classrooms.

Factors affecting long–term gains in languages learning

A multitude of factors combine to inhibit long term gains in languages learning. These are already known, and this study has simply confirmed a great deal of pre - existing knowledge. A key issue already mentioned relates to the time allocated to languages and the way it is organised. Increasing the time allocation is a resource issue that cannot be ignored.

Languages delivery strategies	Frequency
Increase time allocation to Languages (time allocated should be **adequate frequent and regular**) Allocate same time as other KLA's. Ensure that centrally mandated time allocations are actually implemented	111
Avoid "semesterisation" of Languages	15

Table 24

Table 24 indicates that this study received 126 suggestions about time allocations. 111 said that the time should be increased, and another 15 commented on the semesterisation of languages, an operational policy that serves to fragment language learning in a large number of secondary schools.

[41] Teacher, Qld

As an alternative to commissioning further research as suggested in the Plan, a far better use of funds would be to put in place some measures that directly counter these factors.

Recommendation 13

Authorities/schools should examine their timetabling practices and establish alternative models for schools to follow that do not discriminate against languages learning. Such an examination would include looking at issues that affect the continuity of language learning, the frequency of lessons and competition from other subject areas. Plans should be developed to gradually increase the time allocated to languages lessons in those schools where the time allocation is judged to be inadequate.

Transition and continuity from primary to secondary schooling

As reported in Part 1, the transition from primary school to high school is generally viewed as being poorly handled.

Local co-ordination strategies	Frequency
Co-ordinate programs **across school sectors** – local planning, pooling of students. Curriculum and advisory support, PD , relief etc	88
Connect education authorities, schools and universities. Upgrade language teacher practice placements	9

Table 25

Table 25 above indicates that 88 responses called for greater local planning and co-ordination of languages education. The main issue arises from schools operating largely independently from one another. A lack of dialogue between schools seems to be the norm, rather than the exception. Structures to encourage co-operative curriculum planning between primary schools and secondary schools are rare. The issue is not necessarily simply one of ensuring that the languages taught in primary schools follow on to local secondary schools. Languages can be picked up for the first time at secondary school. The issue is more one of students who have learned a language in primary school being given the option of continuing that language at high school. One suggestion put forward to overcome the problem of small numbers was for schools to cooperatively "pool" students.

In addition to coordinating the languages curriculum across sectors, there were calls for better regional provision of professional development, advisory services and relief teachers. There were 9 comments concerning the need for better links with universities relating to teacher practice placements. As will be reported on later, schools and universities also operate independently from one another – people in schools believe that the links could be closer, so that there is a greater level of understanding between the two sectors.

Recommendation 14

Each jurisdiction needs to audit the effectiveness of the primary to secondary transition in every cluster of schools and establish an action plan to address deficiencies.

Languages at senior secondary level – student grouping

There are a cluster of findings here, all aimed at supporting languages at the senior secondary levels. They relate to resourcing small classes, student incentives, grouping practices and greater use of distance education techniques.

Teachers made a number of complaints about the ways in which students were grouped. Examples included native speakers and non-native speakers in the same classes at Year 12 level, combined year 11 and 12 classes and newly formed high school classes where primary school students have had very mixed experiences. This latter practice results in many students choosing to "drop" a language at the earliest opportunity, with the unlikely prospect of returning to the language in subsequent years.

> *"Very often Yr 11 and Yr 12 students are taught in the same class, as not many students continue with their language. This is an absolute disgrace. It compares with specialist math Yr 11 and Yr 12 being in the same lesson - in fact, it is worse, as language learning needs students to engage in oral exercises, practicing, listening etc. etc. – Yr 12 students work on a very different level than Yr 11 students".* [42]

Tables 26 and 27 indicates that a total of 73 comments were received in relation to providing sufficient resources to schools to allow small discrete classes to operate at senior levels.

[42] Teacher, SA

Languages delivery strategies	Frequency
Avoid multi-level ability grouping, especially at senior levels – how can it be fun and or challenging for both groups? Introduce streaming.	29

Table 26

Language teacher staffing issues	Frequency
Fund schools to enable **smaller**/any classes to operate. Schools should provide a curriculum guarantee – that is, if a student starts a language, it will go through to Year 12.	44

Table 27

A number of schools access open learning or distance education providers when senior student numbers are low. This is to be applauded, however it would appear that other schools simply cancel classes, or introduce multi-level or multi-year grouping to address the problem. This is not an easy issue for principals to deal with, as they have to balance many competing pressures on resources.

Recommendation 15

Jurisdictions and schools should allocate extra staffing resources to avoid situations where grouping students who are at very different levels of proficiency disadvantages both groups.

Languages at senior secondary level – appropriate courses

Another separate but related issue is the lack of differentiated courses for native and non-native speakers. In a number of States, there is only one accredited course at the year 12 level in particular languages, such as Mandarin. As native and non-native speakers are assessed together, it is reported that many competent, non-native speakers choose other subjects, because they believe that their university entrance scores will suffer under this competitive assessment regime.

> *"If our system continues to place true 2nd language learners in the same ranking system as native speakers, then one can not blame students for deciding not to continue their language studies into their senior years. It is all very well to assess students on a criteria based assessment system, but totally unjust to then rank them against native speakers in order to calculate their OP"* [43]

Eleven responses were received that alleged that Year 12 language courses were simply too difficult. This claim needs to be investigated.

Languages curriculum strategies	Frequency
Make **senior courses achievable** (Comments received from NSW, NT, QLD, SA and VIC)	11

Table 28

[43] Teacher, Qld

Recommendation 16

Curriculum authorities should examine senior secondary course provision to ensure that courses which differentially target native speakers and non-native speakers are available through to Year 12. The level of difficulty of Year 12 courses and assessment should be re-assessed.

Incentives to study languages through to Year 12

Some 68 suggestions were received in relation to various types of incentives to support the continuation of languages through to the end of Year 12. Some of the incentives listed in Table 29 apply to teachers as well as senior students. Some of the suggestions for students include:

- Providing subsidies for student overseas excursions
- Providing scholarships for student overseas travel/study/work on the completion of Year 12
- Increasing funding for international student exchanges
- Provide a bonus for the university entrance scores of students who include a language in their Year 12 subject package
- Provide a suite of language prizes for Year 12 students
- Increase the range of scholarships for students who wish to study languages at university
- Introduce beginner language courses in Years 11 and 12 with different assessment regimes from that of continuing languages.

In addition, there were several suggestions that Universities institute an entrance requirement that includes the study of a language in Year 11 or Year 12. In a similar vein, there were also a few suggestions that universities introduce a range of language pre-requisites for particular degrees, thereby putting extra pressure on senior students to include a language in their study program.

Develop a suite of incentives to promote Languages education	**Frequency**
Introduce international **travel** subsidies, funding, exchanges, sabbaticals, scholarships - for students and teachers. Bring back former SLSOC (NSW)	49
Introduce an **incentive system** for **Yr 12** senior students to choose a language, such as - UAI bonus, prizes, exchanges, beginner courses – introduce incentives to become language teachers	19

Table 29

Recommendation 17

Schools and education authorities should establish policies of providing incentives directed towards boosting the attractiveness of learning languages through to the end of Year 12, and back up these policies with appropriate funding.

Language learning in the early years of schooling

A strong majority of people believe that it is best to start learning a language in the early years of schooling. In addition, there were 48 written responses which advocated this position. The strength of this finding would support the setting of a priority by the MCEETYA Taskforce to target the early years of schooling as a base on which to progressively expand the provision of languages education.

Should all students study Languages? Should it be compulsory?	**Pa** %	**St** %	**LT** %	**P** %	**LA** %	**TL** %
Learning a Language should start in the early years of Primary school	86	56	84	79	84	79

Table 30

Recommendation 18

As resources permit, schools and education authorities should commence introducing languages education into first two years of primary school.

Languages and vocational education

As part of a marketing campaign, a number of people believe that the link between language expertise and a greater availability of career options should be promoted.

Develop a media campaign in support of Languages education	**Frequency**
Make explicit the link between Language expertise and greater **career options**	30

Table 31

Specifically, a campaign to promote the value of language learning should include a vocational component. Such a campaign should be supported by increasing the knowledge of school based careers advisors. Both language teachers and students reported instances of unsupportive advice being received from careers teachers in relation to the continuing study of a language.

> *"I loved learning German at school and wanted to continue studying in my VCE. But when I went to my careers counselling session with the Careers Adviser, he said that I should try to do another subject that I would do well in and that languages was pretty hard. I am not sure how he knows how well I would have gone in German. He also said that if I pick German the class will probably not run as it is cancelled each year because not enough people pick it. He said I was better off to try to get into a subject that would run."* [44]

[44] Student, Victoria

Recommendation 19

Schools and jurisdictions should work on making the links between learning languages and the increased career options which are available for young people who have language expertise. Careers advisors need to be made aware of these opportunities.

Use of information and communication technologies in languages classrooms

Language teachers in the majority consider that there is sufficient and relevant content available on the internet to support their teaching, although access to this resource appears to be constrained. The fact that 45% of students and 53% of principals agreed that their teachers regularly use the internet, would support an argument that access is somewhat limited, although this assertion is made in the absence of any objective data as to optimal use patterns. On the positive side, 83% of teachers value the use of ICT for learning languages.

Resources available for Language teaching	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Language teaching is well resourced in my school (LA/TL this state)	65	NA	65	63	14	10
My Language teacher uses computers and the internet in my classes	NA	45	NA	NA	NA	NA
Access to good quality ICT is a problem for Language teaching	NA	NA	69	NA	61	55
I am convinced of the value of ICT as an appropriate tool for learning Languages	NA	NA	83	NA	83	63
The internet lacks relevant content for use during lessons in my Language classes	NA	NA	24	NA	18	12
Language teachers at my school routinely use the internet and new communications technology in their classes	NA	45	NA	53	NA	NA

Table 32

Table 33 records that 43 suggestions were made about increasing the use of ICT and distance education techniques in languages learning. Given the challenges of establishing networks of languages teachers in more remote areas, it is not surprising that a number of those surveyed suggested an increased use of ICT for teacher professional development, as well as for teaching purposes.

Classroom teaching strategies	Frequency
Expand use **of ICT/web/distance** education techniques. Improve ICT access. Improve and increase teacher PD in use of ICT.	43

Table 33

Increasing the use of ICT in languages classrooms can be supported also on the grounds that it introduces another element of variety into lessons, and is likely to cater for a wider range of student learning styles. Engaging students is a challenge for all teachers, and the wider the range of delivery mechanisms utilised will assist in this quest.

Recommendation 20

Schools and jurisdictions should consider the requirements of language classes and classrooms when planning ICT infrastructure provision in schools.

Strand 2 – Teacher supply and retention

Teacher supply and retention

Objective

To enhance the provision of appropriately qualified teachers of languages in order to work towards addressing issues related to supply and demand.

Underpinning principle

A well-qualified and prepared teacher work force; together with program conditions and deployment practices that support quality, consistency and continuity; are necessary in the provision of quality languages education.

Clearly there can be no increase in student participation in languages without increasing the supply of quality teachers. Teacher supply was a major issue in 1996, and remains largely unaddressed 11 years later. Realistically, solving this problem will take time, given the shaky base on which jurisdictions have to build. And potential language teachers will be highly sought after by employers (both private enterprise and government) who operate globally. The conclusion is inescapable – the education sector must match other employers in terms of incentives and attractive working conditions.

Given the present (albeit generalised) picture of languages education in this country, it is evident that a talented young person who decides to become a language teacher must have an extraordinary sense of dedication, given the situation that they are likely to face in schools. They may well be asked to teach in a context where their work is not particularly well valued by the school community, where their position is vulnerable, where their job is one cobbled together from a number of part time positions, where professional support is lacking and where they continually have to justify their own existence. It is worth considering the story of a young South Australian teacher at this point:

> *"My role as a language teacher in a small country town has been to develop the French program beyond Year 8 level. To this end, I have been successful, with my fourth Year 12 class in 2007. However, it has been an emotionally exhausting operation. Undoubtedly, I have paid a high price for this success as I have had limited support from colleagues and even administration. In my first year at the school, I was told by a colleague (who is now a Deputy Principal), "French will never work here, kids won't choose it, because there are too many choices". Demoralising, perhaps but I have had to fight this attitude and negativity constantly over six years. Even today, students and parents alike have been "counselled out" of selecting to study a language. Fortunately the parent community*

has been supportive of me but it's tough. At the age of 33, I have been considering starting my own family but the thought of losing my years of work because there are no teachers available, or at least willing to work in the country.

I am aware of a number of excellent jobs in the city which are becoming available, thus further reducing the possibility of acquiring another teacher here. I would really like to see a national campaign highlighting the importance of language learning and its benefits, promoting the good work in schools and the outcomes for students who have studied a language. Eg: My first Year 12 French student, is currently volunteering in Peru, as an English teacher. He plans to continue French and Spanish at university as part of an International Studies or Journalism Degree. To highlight the fact that we live in a global community and that being bilingual is no longer restricted to the Europeans. We have French people travelling and working in our region. A student working in the local McDonalds restaurant was able to assist four French tourists who spoke little English. She was delighted to recount this story to her class. This is REAL LIFE!!!!!!

As I say to my students, it's not about the French language - it's about being able to communicate with others outside of our cultural borders, to understand the mentality and attitudes of others in their words. So much is lost in translation, so live it and breathe it!
I hope that my little country life anecdotes can be of some use in your research. I am passionate about languages, I speak six in total and as an 'Anglo Saxon' Aussie try to demonstrate to my kids that anyone can do that!!" [45]

Potential languages teachers are in the employment market place, so is it realistic to expect that the teaching profession should recruit the brightest and the best to its ranks? If the answer is "yes", then an enormous amount of work needs to done to realise this aspiration, including the implementation of a range of workforce planning strategies and structured incentives.

Negotiating incentives that impinge on existing enterprise bargaining agreements may well prove challenging and radical solutions such as offering Australian Workplace Agreements to a sub-set of the teaching force is likely to be an industrial impossibility.

This study supports all the proposed actions in the Plan, and urges decision-makers to commit resources, think innovatively and display bold leadership. Yesterday's answers are not good enough for tomorrow.

[45] Teacher, SA

Recommendation 21

Relevant authorities should establish an action plan that produces significant yearly increases in the numbers of language teachers in training, commencing immediately. Baseline data for the number of language teachers currently in training should be established, and each year from 2008 onwards the number of teachers in training be compared with the baseline data. This data should be published widely on an annual basis.

Actions

- Monitor and analyse data related to teacher supply and demand to support workforce planning at the jurisdiction level.
- Share information about effective workforce planning strategies currently being undertaken at jurisdiction level.
- Develop and implement initiatives to attract and retain more teachers of languages. Initiatives to consider include:
  - teaching scholarships to encourage school students to become teachers, particularly targeted at rural and remote areas
  - reimbursement of HECS fees
  - internships to students in final year of teacher training
  - scholarships for in-country training
  - additional tertiary places for languages education
  - incentive payments and career pathways
  - offers of permanent employment
  - recognition and support for overseas trained teachers
  - peer tutoring and mentoring programs
  - retraining opportunities.
- Review the content and structure of teacher education courses with a view to improving access to, and the quality of, preparation for languages teachers.
- Explore how to provide teacher preparation courses for Australian Indigenous Languages and for after hours ethnic/community languages schooling.
- Identify strategies to recognise and support speakers of Australian Indigenous Languages involved in school languages programs.
- Identify strategies to recognise and support community languages speakers teaching in after hours ethnic/community languages schooling.

Incentives for teachers

Respondents to this study canvassed the range of incentives that are mentioned in the Plan. Providing access to sabbatical leave was also put forward in this study.

Develop a suite of incentives to promote Languages education	Frequency
Provide **incentives** for language teachers and schools – target rural schools. Change current HR policy disincentives – such as short term contracts. Improve access to permanency. Introduce salary incentives.	17

Table 34

One specific issue that can surely be addressed is the practice of employing language teachers on short term contracts. As one principal says:

"The major issue of concern is always the one of financing Language Learning. Often teachers are not attracted by year to year contracted positions which in itself gives the impression that the subject is not important. However, with the limited funding options schools have, there is little other option." [46]

Recommendation 22

Relevant employing authorities should establish a suite of employment related changes and incentives designed to recruit language teachers to the teaching profession and to retain them once they have been recruited. A pool of incentive funding needs to be established to support such a policy.

Teacher education courses

Co-ordination, planning and leadership issues	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Schools and universities work well together on Language education issues in my State/Territory	NA	NA	17	4	15	25

Table 35

Language teachers, principals, languages advisors and university language teachers share a belief that there is a disconnect between schools and universities in relation to language education. Universities of course play an integral role in ensuring a continuing supply of language teachers. They are also solely responsible for the quality of their graduates, and can play a significant part in the provision of professional development and re-training of teachers. But if structured relationships between the school and university sectors currently exist, it is evident they have achieved little success in addressing current problems.

Tertiary level issues	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
Language teacher training courses are of a high quality in Australian Universities	NA	NA	37	17	15	33
The Languages Department is strongly supported by the administration of this University	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	24
At my Institution, there are links between the Languages programs and the teacher education programs	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	39

Table 36

"There is little commitment to sound language teacher training in Australian universities. Most courses are well below the recommended 60 hours originally deemed necessary - and that was before mixed proficiency levels and the Internet arrived! Classes are for student teachers of mixed languages, so there is no longer any close training in teaching the specific

[46] Principal, Victoria

points of difficulty in the particular language, or the particular cultural factors that are important.
There is little or no supervision of professional practice from universities now, so that links between theory and principles and actual practice are left to the student teacher to make." [47]

The views expressed in the above quote seem to be supported by the data in table 36 above. There is very limited confidence in the quality of university level languages programs. If these perceptions are found to be true, successful implementation of much of the National Plan must be cast into serious doubt. One obvious response is to recommend an audit of the "languages capacity" of Australian universities be undertaken, and then decide whether to lift the capacities of those which fall short of being able to support the Plan – or alternatively to only work with those which currently have the capacity to respond to the demands of the Plan.

Table 36 also highlights some other impediments to the support that languages education can expect to receive from the tertiary sector. Language educators at this level generally do not feel supported by their respective university administrations. And only a minority (39%) believed that there were links between the languages and education faculties at their particular institutions. Not only do universities not work well with schools, their internal structures are not universally well configured to assist in the further implementation of the languages Plan.

Tertiary Languages Faculty strategies	**Frequency**
Upgrade quality/quantity of University language courses. Greater access to double degrees. Revise current language courses to make them more suitable for teachers – some too hard, others lack language specificity.	12
Include Language in primary school teachers **pre-service** training. Universities should properly assess language knowledge of undergraduates.	16
Define University Language Pre-requisites	5

Table 37

Table 37 summarises the suggestions received in this study which impact on universities. 12 responses referred to an upgrade of the quality of university languages courses, supporting the quantitative data. Obviously the nature of university languages programs will differ, as somewhat opposing views were put forward. Several people suggested that some university languages courses were simply too difficult. Others suggested that they were not language specific, which could be interpreted as being too easy.

"Tertiary Institutions Training prospective languages teachers should:
- *provide the resources for students to have both language specific methodology training as well as general languages teaching methodology training.*

[47] Tertiary language teacher, Victoria

- *be strict in enforcing qualification rules, i.e. a prospective student who has not had enough language training should not be admitted to a course aimed at training prospective languages teachers."* [48]

The above quote is in support of universities both enforcing standards and providing both language specific training as well as general teaching methodology.

The study also received 16 suggestions that languages be incorporated into all primary teacher pre-service training. This suggestion if taken up has resource implications for universities, however if progressively implemented it would tackle a number of factors which currently impede language education in primary schools. Mainstream teachers being given responsibility for language education would;

- assist in the integration of languages across the curriculum
- tackle the problems caused by language teachers providing mainstream teachers their "release time" – although it would shift this to another curriculum area
- facilitate a whole school view of the importance of languages
- encourage teachers to see the links between languages and literacy in English
- encourage more "immersion style" teaching of languages.

These suggested benefits are supported by the experience of a Victorian primary school teacher.

> *"I am the LOTE coordinator at (name of school). We have three committed classroom teachers who have adequate grasp of the Italian language to teach our students. We work well as a team and do offer the students a very good program even though we could benefit from a qualified LOTE teacher. Our aim is to expose and interest our students to basic vocabulary and conversation as well as to increase their cultural awareness. I believe that there is a very positive attitude towards our LOTE program and our staff is very supportive of what we aim to achieve. We all believe that LOTE is a valuable program for our students."* [49]

This teacher acknowledges that the school would benefit from a qualified languages teacher, however is a long term objective of turning all primary school teachers into qualified languages teachers totally out of the question? Perhaps it is, but there are compromise positions such as:

- combining training in languages expertise with generalised primary expertise
- combining training in languages expertise with a specialised area such as music, the arts, science, ICT or Physical Education.

[48] Tertiary language teacher, Tasmania
[49] Teacher, Victorian primary school

The latter approach would allow more languages teachers to be employed on a full time basis in schools, instead of in multiple locations. It would also facilitate a bilingual or immersion style of teaching in the specialist areas. Imagine the music lessons being taught in French, or the PE lessons in Japanese!

Recommendation 23

Education authorities and universities need to establish structures whereby than work together to evaluate the success of existing language courses and to design new ones that meet the needs of the National Plan, including re-training of classroom teachers.

Strand 3 – Professional learning

Professional learning

Objective

To support the provision of high quality, ongoing and structured professional learning programs to further enhance the quality of teaching.

Underpinning principle

Ongoing and sustained professional learning programs are essential to quality teaching and learning.

Well structured professional learning programs are essential if languages teaching and learning is to be supported. Currently, language teachers often lead lives of professional isolation, an experience that should not be acceptable in the twenty-first century in a wealthy country like Australia. Where languages represent a small component of the school curriculum, it is likely to be allocated a small budget, which may not stretch to supporting involvement in professional development. Centralised or regional support in the form of specialised curriculum officers is often limited.

Language teacher support strategies	Frequency
Develop programs for all teaching staff and principals to **improve support** for Language education (language teachers should not to have to do it on their own). Career counsellor support is important. Principals should provide the same level of support for languages as other KLA's, including in-school disciplinary support.	71
Establish **networks** of Language teachers to reduce isolation. Such networks should address PD, welfare issues– also mentors for language teachers	27
Expand PD opportunities, Increase support and funding	23
Make **PD language specific** rather than general**.** Include professional development in classroom management techniques.	12
Support **new teachers,** especially those appointed to rural locations.	7

Table 38

Table 38 indicates that the study received 69 responses that suggested improvements to professional learning programs for languages teachers. In addition, a number of the responses in relation to ICT supported a greater application of this technology to professional learning. As broadband and 3G networks continue to be rolled out, this technology is becoming increasingly available for video-conferencing, teleconferencing and the like.

Table 38 also indicates a strong response in relation to professional learning for other school staff. Language teachers, like all teachers, need to work in a supportive environment. The attitudes and beliefs of principals, deputies, other teachers and careers advisors all contribute to the priority that a school

has for languages, and the esteem in which it is held. Ideally, there should be strong, influential leadership from principals that creates a climate where there is a critical mass of support for language teachers and language programs in every school. Unfortunately, the reality for languages is that must compete for resources with other subject areas. Whilst some KLA's enjoy protection from such competition, in most schools the same cannot be said for languages. As the African adage goes, "when the waterhole begins to dry up, the animals start to look at one another differently". Languages are usually the more vulnerable animals in resource scarce schools.

Actions

- Consider the development of structured and ongoing professional learning programs for teachers of languages, in order to maintain and strengthen their linguistic proficiency, and develop understandings of inter-cultural language learning and curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment, through opportunities such as:
  - accredited tertiary study
  - immersion weekends
  - vacation workshops
  - in-country study and exchange programs
  - community experience for teachers involved in Australian Indigenous Languages programs
  - accredited school based research projects which encourage reflection, dialogue and innovation
  - mentoring opportunities.
- Share information about successful models of professional learning at a national and state level.
- Promote incentives and initiatives aimed at encouraging teacher participation in ongoing and sustained professional learning programs, such as:
  - reimbursement of university fees for postgraduate study
  - study release time to facilitate postgraduate study
  - subsidies for in-country study and study tours
  - sabbaticals
  - optional tertiary accreditation
  - recognition of postgraduate qualifications.
- Explore how to enhance professional learning for personnel involved in the delivery of Australian Indigenous Languages, and of languages taught through after hours ethnic/community languages schooling.
- Consider the development of professional learning programs for school leaders to support them in their role of providing direction and managing quality languages programs.

Professional learning programs

This study received a number of written responses making suggestions along the same lines as in the National Plan for different types of professional learning programs. The need for such programs seems uncontroversial. It would seem that the only question which needs to be asked now is – what is stopping these happening? As with many other sections of the Plan, the only action that MCEETYA has agreed to at this stage is to "consider" further action.

Professional learning incentives and initiatives

The study received a number of suggestions concerning incentives to participate in professional learning programs similar to those mentioned in the Plan. Clearly an expansion of incentives over and above those already available will require additional resourcing. Whether or not additional resources will be provided will be a litmus test, revealing the true priority that jurisdictions have for the future of languages education.

Professional learning for school leaders

The importance of whole school support was mentioned previously. The study received 71 written comments which mentioned the need for learning programs for other teaching staff, including principals. A number of parents, teachers and language advisors focussed on the need for the principal's support in implementing strong languages programs.

> *"There is a large gap between government plans/policies and actual practice in schools. Languages teachers continue to feel let down by the system implementation of languages in the curriculum and in many cases by the attitudes of their own colleagues in other learning areas and in many cases principals who have outdated views on second language learning."* [50]

Of course languages teachers do not necessarily fully understand all the pressures on principals. If a school or system operates its curriculum largely on the basis of supply and demand, and provides principals with the autonomy to respond to local market forces instead of over-arching curriculum requirements, then languages will be one of the vulnerable areas. The community is much less likely to object to a scaling back of language provision than it would to say basic skills in primary school, or science, mathematics or English in secondary school. Further, when principals are faced with balancing global budgets, it is often easier to reduce language provision rather than subsidising it at the expense of other subjects. Many principals are unlikely to expose themselves to staff criticism, especially when their employers provide them with a level of decision making autonomy that does not call them to account for not meeting mandated curriculum requirements.

Recommendation 24

Education departments and employing authorities should address concerns about the nature and availability of teacher professional development as a matter of urgency. Similarly, the development of learning programs for school leaders on the value of languages should commence in the context of promoting the national plan.

[50] Teacher, WA

Strand 4 – Program development

Program development

Objective

To enhance access, choice and continuity in languages learning in order to better meet a variety of learner needs.

Underpinning principle

Program structures need to be flexible to cater for the range of learners across the years of schooling; and take into account the cumulative nature of language learning.

This research elicited five fundamental responses to the issue of better meeting the variety of student needs. These were to:

- Group students of similar ability or language experience – some form of streaming
- Make languages optional so that students can self-select languages according to their level of interest
- Use a greater range of techniques, including ICT and distance education
- Integrate language learning across the curriculum in primary schools – make links with literacy and other curriculum areas
- Use immersion or bi-lingual techniques

Students in particular advocated that language classes should be fun, interesting and relevant. Many suggestions were received about the value of excursions, games, exchanges and overseas trips as a necessary part of languages education.

This study does not support any increase in the extent of "optionality" of language provision. Except for making languages optional the other 4 points above have some merit, but cannot be applied in all situations or locations. Whilst making languages optional in secondary schools would solve a number of problems, it does not address the issue of extending the reach of languages. This option would simply serve to take pressure off schools and education authorities to extend the uptake of languages. It would most likely result in a decline in languages provision. If this option was to be considered, it would have to be matched with a range of additional incentives for students to study languages, to counter the likely drift to other subjects.

Grouping students with similar language background or experience is problematic within single schools, however some kind of cross school or

regional grouping may be possible in some locations. The other three suggestions may all be applicable in particular locations.

Actions

- Share information about existing strategies and publications that support access, choice and continuity at the school and jurisdictional level, and promote through the web-based strategy.
- Consider documenting and disseminating models of good practice and effective operational management of languages education in a variety of school contexts and settings.
- Consider the development of curriculum materials to support the provision of a range of languages.
- Explore the scope for sharing existing distance education courses, and for collaborating in future developments to address gaps in the provision of distance education.
- Consider the use and future development of flexible learning technologies for the delivery of languages programs.
- Explore initiatives that strengthen connections between languages and the world of work (eg: development and articulation of pathways for languages learning in the Vocational Education and Training sector).

Good practice in language learning

The study received information from a number of schools that were highly successful in implementing language education programs. These schools would be well known in language teacher circles, professional associations and by education authorities. However it is unlikely that changing less successful programs into successful ones can be brought about simply by the dissemination of information about successful models. Invariably change happens when leadership is exercised, committing energy and resources to a new way of doing things. In other words, intervention must occur. This is not to say that sharing and dissemination of good practice should be discouraged. It should not. But leaders need to understand that languages teachers cannot make changes on their own. Intervention by leadership at the school, regional or education authority level is vital.

School level strategies	Frequency
Utilise community resources/expertise – pay for some native speakers (such as the Victorian language assistants)	40
Give students and parents **more say and more information**. Parents want more knowledge about languages in order to be able to support their children.	28
Provide "**curriculum protection**" for Languages. Reduce competition for resources	32
Integrate Language with other primary school subjects	19
Provide language teachers with their own **language classrooms**	19
Utilise outside class time/outside school hours, also community classes	7

Table 39

Table 39 indicates the range of responses received in relation to school based strategies that represent good practice in languages education. 40 responses advocated that language programs utilise community based resources to a greater extent. Such resources could include employing native speakers as

languages assistants (this already happens in some states). Other suggestions included using community expertise on a voluntary basis, not only in relation to specific language learning, but in cultural aspects of school programs.

28 responses mentioned the need to provide parents and students with more information on the benefits of learning a language. Students wanted more say in choosing their language of study. (Many also wanted the right not to choose a language).

Several suggestions were also received advocating greater use of time outside of the formal school day for learning languages.

Classroom teaching strategies	Frequency
Make Language classes more **exciting/fun/relevant**	63
Expand use **of ICT/web/distance** education techniques. Improve ICT access. Improve and increase teacher PD in use of ICT.	43

Table 40

Whilst 63 responses advocated making languages classes more exciting, fun and relevant, there was also ample evidence that many languages teachers make superhuman efforts to do just this. Given the elective nature of languages in secondary schools, teachers have to maintain sufficient numbers to justify their own continuing employment, which is very different from some practitioners in other curriculum areas. On top of this, and because of the smaller time allocation given to language classes, many language teachers have to teach more students than other mainstream teachers. Consequently it takes longer to establish good relationships with students and they may have more preparation, more marking, and be required to write more reports. In response to the proposition "I am overwhelmed with work" it is hardly surprising that 63% of language teachers agreed.

The use of ICT, web-based learning and distance education was well supported, with 43 comments being put forward.

Recommendation 25

Schools should be assisted to audit their current practice in languages education against the principles embodied in good practice. They should identify shortfalls in their own operations and develop individual action plans to address such shortfalls.

Development of curriculum materials

Whilst some teachers said that spent considerable time developing their own resources, a greater problem especially in primary schools is the lack of useful course outlines or indeed a basic languages syllabus for teachers to follow. Developing a set of syllabi, supported by sets of resources may seem somewhat old-fashioned, but such a move would surely assist in clarifying the purpose and expected student outcomes of language courses, as well as taking some of the pressure off teachers to develop their own materials.

A recommendation has already been made on developing model courses.

The following suggestions are a sample of those submitted pointing to innovative practice in languages education

ICT through French immersion

"Ruyton has introduced a content-based programme from P-6 with an innovative approach to timetabling. Students learn ICT in French." [51]

Whole school cooperative immersion techniques

"I work part-time as a Languages Coordinator for the government system as well as teaching part-time in an independent school.
The school where I teach has a staff that is extremely supportive of the Languages program and it makes a HUGE difference. The students begin the program in Prep which is a great time to start I believe. Sometimes the classroom teachers visit the language classes and support the learning by including target language songs as part of the music program, for instance. Junior students play games in the target language in some of their regular classes. That support by the whole staff is invaluable." [52]

Accelerated Integrated Method

"AIM (Accelerative Integrated Method) is a gesture approach to the teaching of Languages and accelerates the acquisition of student fluency by providing students with the vocabulary and grammar that they need ...as they need it! The students learn their second language as they would their first language...through the ears and produce through the mouths BEFORE moving on the writing and reading.
I teach exclusively in French and my students as young as grade PREP are coming out with natural spontaneous ...correct sentences in French. I also teach students who have learning difficulties and have had positive results." [53]

The study supports the proposition that innovative ideas for language teaching and learning be collated and disseminated nationally.

Recommendation 26

Examples of good practice should be collected from schools and jurisdictions nationally, ensuring a range of diversity. Case studies should be written up in plain English, published and disseminated to every school in the country. This initial process should then be followed up with a national roll out of professional development for school communities to discuss the research. The outcome would be the establishment of statewide or regional planning teams to re-structure school language programs along best practice lines.

[51] Teacher, Ruyton Girls School, Victoria
[52] Teacher, Tasmania
[53] Teacher, Victoria – see www.hearsaylearning.com for details of the AIM program

Strand 5 – Quality assurance

Quality assurance

Objective

To monitor and evaluate the provision and quality of languages education at all levels.

Underpinning principle

Monitoring and evaluation processes which engage jurisdictions and schools in reflection and dialogue will support provision of quality languages education.

Quality assurance processes are an essential part of monitoring the National Plan. Part of quality assurance should be the development of much more rigorous accountability processes, especially at the school and systemic operational levels.

Actions

- Develop a detailed evaluation strategy to monitor the implementation of this Plan.
- Collect and analyse student participation data on an annual basis for national planning purposes and to enable current provision to be measured.
- Explore the possibility of reporting participation data on languages through the Annual National Report on Schooling.
- Explore the development and use of student standards, program standards and teacher standards to support evaluation processes.
- Develop national sample assessment processes to determine student learning outcomes.
- Share information about effective evaluation processes implemented at jurisdiction and school level, and promote through the web-based strategy.

Current operational inconsistencies with the National Plan

If States through MCEETYA intend to develop a series of evaluation strategies to monitor the implementation of the National Plan, they should start by eliminating those operational inconsistencies that currently work against it. These exist in every state and territory if the views of practitioners are accurate. The following are a selection of views put to this study:

Queensland

> *"In Queensland there are strict rules governing time allocation and student exemption from LOTE but these are generally ignored by schools with marginalised LOTE programs through the approval of Regional and*

District Directors who have the power to "bend the rules". So much for a multicultural Queensland !!!!" [54]

When is a mandatory time allocation mandatory? Is the Queensland government saying in effect that some problems in the delivery of languages in some schools are simply insoluble?

"It is extremely worrying that Ed Queensland has started to organise a trial in West Moreton area to basically cut LOTE from their schools, dependant on local school management, if they wish, and introduce instead 'Studies' which will be units close to SOSE cultural units (The words LOTE were not allowed to be used in referring to these units). If 'successful' in this area, would it continue to be introduced throughout the state? Many reasons were cited, including a lack of competent language teachers, and widespread 'behaviour management' problems in LOTE classes. This is of great concern." [55]

Queensland seems to be looking at changing the nature of languages education, by effectively removing the language component. This is not in accord with intercultural language learning, which preserves language rigour in its approach. In fact the West Morteon trial seems to represent a capitulation to the problems of language education, rather than an attempt to solve them.

Victoria

"Schools are removing LOTE teachers and replacing this with 'language awareness' a subject in name only with no guidelines, no curriculum, and no recognised qualification. Also it has NO OUTCOME." [56]

Victoria seems to be going down the same track as Queensland if this comment is accurate.

"Money comes into Victorian schools as part of LOTE funding, but does not necessarily get spent where it is designed to be spent as it is up to the principal to decide where the funds go." [57]

How can a government justify allocating money to programs that do not operate? Does the decision making autonomy of individual principals over-ride government policy?

"There is concern over the reporting of LOTE achievements in Victoria under VELS as it is late being implemented. The report will also be limited

[54] Teacher, Qld
[55] Teacher, Qld
[56] Teacher, Victoria
[57] Parent, Victoria

to senior primary grades. The LOTE section can also be deleted from the VELS report. Schools feel they can delay reporting and this is lowering the status of LOTE." [58]

If the reporting of language achievement is optional at the school level, how will Victoria be placed to report nationally?

Tasmania

"I fear for the success of the implementation and acceptance of the National Statement and Plan unless it is mandated. In reality, if the Essential Learnings had not been mandated (especially with all the problems with it here in Tasmania), I wonder whether it would have been taken on by schools or accepted by parents. This will be exacerbated by the fact that our curriculum is being "refined" here in Tasmania and the draft document shows that languages will longer be regarded as a KLA. This seems to be completely contradictory to the aspirations of the National Plan, sends completely the wrong message out to the public, and puts languages on a very precarious footing in this state." [59]

What is the real status and priority of languages education in Tasmania, if it is not specifically mentioned in the curriculum frameworks and is no longer a KLA? If it is not mentioned in the curriculum frameworks, what do language teachers actually teach? And on what basis or authority do they teach it? Where does Tasmania currently stand in relation to the National Statement and Plan?

Western Australia

"Also the DET in WA only provide work fractions to cover LOTE for years 3 to 7 and I have always felt that there should be the opportunity for school communities to choose to begin LOTE earlier.. in years 1 or 2." [60]

How can WA introduce languages in the early childhood years of schooling with this policy in place? Can it find the teaching and other resources needed to shift the commencement of language learning into Years 1 and 2.

"So many LOTE positions are now advertised as just a .4/.5 etc load that it makes a mockery of the effort and costs that individuals have gone to in order to become qualified LOTE teachers. References to going to work in the mining industry from LOTE teachers is not uncommon!" [61]

[58] Teacher, Victoria
[59] Teacher, Tasmania
[60] Teacher WA
[61] Teacher, WA

This particular HR practice does not support the recruitment or retention of language teachers in WA, or in any other state that operates along similar lines.

> *"Generally, funding is low, teachers are isolated - I need to travel at least an hour or two to find another Language teacher to share ideas and issues or moderate with. There is very little support from Central Office and none from the District, as no-one there has any background in languages."* [62]

Low level support such as that described above is not in harmony with the intent of the National Plan.

> *"Despite the compulsory nature of languages to year 9, some high schools are abandoning this."* [63]

Like the examples provided earlier from Queensland and Victoria, is there a capitulation underway in WA to the problems associated with the provision of universal language education?

South Australia

> *"In SA the curriculum standard for meeting the SACSA outcomes is 90 minutes of lesson time. I do not know of many schools that provide this in the catholic sector in which I teach."* [64]

What is the justification for SA Catholic schools allocating less than the specified time for languages?

> *"In South Australia, the compulsion factor has been removed which means that effectively schools can opt not to offer a language program."* [65]

Is this further evidence of a national capitulation?

New South Wales

> *"One of the aim of the National Plan for Languages is to make Language learning a relevant part of the curriculum and yet many aspects of the HSC exam (NSW) are not relevant to a young person's life (for instance, the monologue at Extension Level, or the analytical questions in Reading and Listening tasks). It is not right that the final outcome of a Language Learning path should be based on analytical, literary skills. These*

[62] Teacher, WA
[63] Teacher, WA
[64] Teacher, SA
[65] Teacher, SA

outcomes put off many students who would otherwise be attracted by a course that offers them a skill for life." [66]

Are the requirements of the NSW HSC a disincentive for students to include a language in their senior school studies? Why is this allowed to happen?

"One area of great concern is the continuing devolution of support at consultant level within the NSW DET. Indonesian, in particular is a language which has suffered diminishing student numbers in recent years and instead of looking at ways in which these numbers may be increased, the NSW DET has removed influential and highly effective and supportive personnel from its consultative ranks." [67]

Is this another example of a government not providing leadership to maintain the provision of languages?

Northern Territory

"There is NO connection with languages between Primary and Secondary schools. Many students don't have to study a language." [68]

This writer was from Darwin, a relatively small city where primary schools are clustered around high schools. Is there a compelling reason why the primary schools and high schools cannot engage in dialogue and coordinate their language courses? Is there a risk in implementing such a policy?

Australian Capital Territory

"….. the high schools in the ACT do not have a set course documents to work from so there are inconsistencies between schools. This makes it difficult for college teachers to address each student's individual needs." [69]

Every high school in the ACT develops its own courses. There is little or no oversight of this process or the standards reached when students make the transition from high school to secondary college. Is there a compelling reason why ACT high school language courses cannot be standardised? Are there risks associated with doing this?

[66] Teacher, NSW
[67] Teacher, NSW
[68] Teacher, NT
[69] Teacher, ACT

Recommendation 27

Each education jurisdiction should identify and publicly acknowledge those policies and practices that run counter to the intent of the National Plan, and report back to MCEETYA outlining the steps that the jurisdiction is taking to eliminate or change those policies and practices, including milestones and a timetable of expected completion.

Strand 6 – Advocacy and promotion of languages learning

Advocacy and promotion of languages learning

Objective

To promote the benefits of languages learning in order to develop and strengthen positive community attitudes and perceptions of the value of languages education.

Underpinning principle

Leadership and advocacy at all levels, including high profile community members, educational leaders, teachers and students, are required to facilitate quality improvement in languages education.

This study found strong support for the need to strengthen community attitudes towards the study of languages. One of the most difficult and demoralising aspects of any teacher's job is to work in an environment where they feel unsupported by the broader community. Even more damaging to morale is when their own school community has reservations about the importance of their work. Even the subtlest lack of support by a school is transmitted to students and their parents. A concerted campaign is required to shift community attitudes towards the need for quality, widespread language education.

Actions

- Consider initiatives to promote the educational, cognitive, social and career benefits of languages learning, for example:
  - identify national champions from various walks of life
  - produce print and electronic publications and promotional materials
  - organise national forums and public meetings
  - designate an Australian Year of Languages to mark the importance of languages learning
  - enlist the participation of the media in developing a positive profile for languages.
- Share information about successful promotional activities undertaken at state, territory and individual school level.
- Consider initiatives to enhance student motivation and improve student retention in the schooling sector and into the tertiary sector (eg: bonus points, transition programs, exchanges, study tours, sister school arrangements, tertiary scholarships).

Need for a public relations campaign

Although the National Statement and Plan was released in 2005, only 18% of parents who participated in this study were aware of its existence. Not that this is necessarily surprising, but if it is to win the hearts and minds of all

stakeholders, parents as a group need to be included in relevant information loops and be invited to participate in appropriate strategies.

Perhaps more surprisingly, almost 40% of both languages teachers and principals were also not aware of this document. And if a large percentage of language teachers are not familiar with this initiative, it is reasonable to assume that very few teachers of other subjects are aware it. One of the major findings of this study is that, (in primary schools especially), changes to the languages programs require an across school understanding and effort. From this perspective, the National Statement and Plan is most likely to be a well kept secret in most of Australia's schools.

Knowledge about and support for the National Plan	Pa %	St %	LT %	P %	LA %	TL %
I am aware of the National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Schools 2005-2008	18	NA	61	62	NA	NA

Table 41

One of the first imperatives of the MCEETYA Task Force will to be ensure that the Statement and Plan is higher in the consciousness of people in schools Perhaps as an aside, another indication of a disconnect between central policy development and school operations, was the continuing widespread useage of the term "LOTE" by people in the field throughout the survey.

A second challenge for MCEETYA will be to convince all stakeholders that the Languages Statement and Plan represents a serious attempt to revitalise this curriculum area. Given the start/stop nature of earlier attempts to implement languages education policies in Australia, it comes as no surprise that all stakeholders expressed low levels of confidence that sufficient resources will be invested in the Plan to actually make a difference.

Notwithstanding this ingrained cynicism, there is a high level of support for a multi-pronged attack on the problems surrounding languages education. And to be fair, the answer is not just in the provision of financial resources. Unless the hearts and minds of the general public are positively engaged in this endeavour, there is considerable potential to waste a great deal of money.

One of the prongs of a multi-pronged attack, is a national media campaign. The study found strong support for such an initiative as one of the first steps of a change management strategy.

When asked for suggestions about how languages could be strengthened in schools, many people commented (see Table 42) that one of the first things to do was to convince parents and the general community of the benefits of languages education. Some 113 written comments specifically suggested one or more elements of a public relations/media campaign. 77 suggested a national campaign, supported by a range of specific initiatives that will be covered later in this report. 26 suggested that schools could do more at the

local level, and 10 suggested that parent organisations promote the issues with other parents.

Develop a media campaign in support of Languages education	Frequency
National **publicity** campaign addressing: importance of languages, promote events, forums – identify a national champion. Promote recruitment of language teachers. National year of languages.	77
Schools/principals should **promote** languages to a greater extent	26
Parent organisations should **promote** languages/parent education programs	10

Table 42

> *We need to run a nationwide advertising campaign (print, radio, television) about the benefits of Language learning. The parents of our current students went through school at a time when Language learning was not compulsory, and it is still seen by them as an "add-on" to the curriculum. We need to explain the many benefits of second language learning. [We] must build on a genuine national commitment, where the message about languages and multiculturalism are not mixed.* [70]

Some other suggestions received by the study, which support the actions anticipated in the National Plan include:

> *"I believe that there needs to be a PR/awareness campaign, building the profile of languages and reinforcing the importance of languages, particularly on TV. Having well-known people talk about how essential it is to learn about other cultures (and not to assume that your own is the best) would make an immense difference. When the Leggo ads came on TV and kids saw famous people speaking in Italian, they were really eager to give it a try. In the same way, we need to have high-profile people talking up languages on a REGULAR basis where students and parents will see it."* [71]

The Leggo pasta sauce advertisements were indeed memorable and could be used as a model for an entertaining advertising campaign.

> *"We need a charismatic key figure to "champion" languages education throughout Australia."* [72]

General Peter Cosgrove spoke gave an inspirational speech to the national languages seminar in 2002 [73]. Perhaps he or someone of his stature could be drafted into a media campaign to promote languages.

The following two contrasting views were received from WA language teachers. The question comes down to who should market languages – from

[70] Teacher, WA
[71] Teacher, NSW
[72] Teacher, NSW
[73] Working Together on Languages Education: A national Seminar. DEST. 2002

above or from languages teachers themselves. In the reality of today, there must be some expectation that language teachers do some self marketing, and there is plenty of evidence that this is happening; indeed to such an extent that is unreasonable. Marketing from the grassroots must be supported by high level support from the highest levels of government.

> *"Marketing of languages needs to be driven from above but also from grass roots. Languages teachers need some training in public relations and marketing techniques so that the exciting events etc that they take so much time over have a much wider and stronger impact on students, colleagues, parents and wider community. Simple pre and post surveys to all of these stakeholders; use of newsletters and local media; finding human interest "angles" on language and culture learning; etc."* [74]

> *"I am always told that I should promote LOTE. I disagree! Regular advertisements through the media and not from LOTE teachers themselves but from higher authorities would perhaps make the difference."* [75]

In supporting a multi-faceted media campaign, this report cautions on the use of publications, especially glossy, jargon-rich colour pamphlets. This is an easy deliverable for governments, but the effectiveness has to be questioned. A smart television or electronic media campaign is likely to have far greater impact.

The final word in this section is a plea from a Tasmanian language teacher.

> *" …[Australian should] engage in a large publicity campaign to shake up the monolingual mindset complacency about learning languages and about intercultural competency. It is just not good enough in a globalised world to grow up monolingually. Australians are missing out on learning one of the most vital skills for life. Monolingualism fosters narrow mindedness. Learning another language is the best way to gain intercultural competencies which include gaining a critical insight in one's own culture as well as in another culture. We need good intercultural communicators."* [76]

Recommendation 28

That MCEETYA support a nationwide media campaign to promote the value of languages education. This campaign should utilise the services of experienced and innovative marketing organisations, and have national, state and local elements.

[74] Teacher, WA
[75] Teacher, WA
[76] Teacher, Tasmania

Strand 7 – Parent partnerships (what the National Plan doesn't address)

The National Plan talks of the need to influence public opinion on language education, but it contains few strategies for engaging parents, except through an arms length media campaign. This is a huge omission, and if unaddressed will result in strategies and actions that lack a vital component. The strength of any change strategy must acknowledge that many parents seek active involvement in their children's education. To treat them as passive consumers of services undervalues the contribution that they can make.

Engaging parents at the school level to discuss language education must be an essential component of this plan. This kind of technique has been employed with values education and other national education initiatives.

The following results from the study give an insight into thinking on the issues around parent involvement.

Parent and student involvement in Languages education	**Pa %**	**St %**	**LT %**	**P %**	**LA %**	**TL %**
My school keeps parents well informed about issues involving Language study	31	30	43	53	11	6
If there were to be a change in the Languages offered at this school, I would expect parents would be consulted	76	NA	77	88	69	NA
If my school decided to change the Languages it teaches, students would be asked for their ideas and concerns	NA	44	NA	NA	NA	NA
Decisions about Languages should be left to school staff as they are the experts	28	19	52	45	35	33
My school involves parents in reviewing its Languages program	15	48	15	88	8	2

Table 43

Apart from the Principals who responded to the survey, all other groups believed that schools did not keep parents well informed about Languages issues. Whilst most would expect that parents be consulted about changes to Language programs, would this be a deep consultative process, or would it be simply giving some information after decisions had been made?

> *"I believe that parents are excluded from many decisions about education. The study of languages is just another example. In my experience parents are not given, as standard practice, information about developments in education, curriculum, government policies and priorities in education. Nor are they consulted in any systematic way about any of these matters. Parents have to rely on their own endeavours and research to find such information: whether it be by reading newspapers, on-line research,*

participation in parent groups such P & F and APC or some other community or education groups.

This exclusion or non inclusivity is a real problem for education in general. There are a lot of written and verbal representations about parents and teachers working as a team with students, to enhance the students learning experience - but my experience is that this is not a team but an autocratic hierarchy where power is exercised by withholding information and limiting participation." [77]

The fact that around half of language teachers and principals believe that the school staff should make decisions about the Language curriculum, makes it seem likely that consultation would at best be superficial in many schools. As is common with other educational issues, parents are underestimated in relation to their desire to be involved in school decision making and in their ability to make considered judgments when properly informed. Parents can be wonderful allies in the process of educational change. Whilst the question to principals was slightly different from those of other groups in relation to involving parents in reviewing Languages, there is little to indicate in their responses that parents would play any significant role in this process.

Recommendation 29

The Plan should be adjusted to acknowledge and incorporate a significant level of parental involvement taking into account the fact that parents are significant stakeholders in the entire exercise of planning for change.

Conclusion – is there a support base on which to build?

The answer to this question is unequivocally yes! Despite the picture of systemic neglect for languages education that this report has painted, there are many schools which are operating quality programs. There are many parents who understand the importance of languages for their children, and more broadly, for the country. There are students who love participating in language classes. There are many excellent language teachers. There are principals prepared to exercise bold leadership in supporting languages in their schools, even in the face of adversity. And most importantly we have nine education ministers who have expressed a positive vision for languages education in Australian schools.

The challenge now is turn the vision into a reality. Can Australia as a nation expect anything less of our educational leaders? Can we afford another decade of neglect?

[77] Parent, WA