

Languages Education Policy in Victoria

Overview of languages policies
and opportunities to engage
bilingual youth in Victoria

ECCV Intern Policy Scoping Paper



The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the Voice of Multicultural Victoria. As the peak advocacy body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For over 40 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

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FOREWORD

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) has long advocated for the importance of investing in languages in Victoria. The principles of equal access, equity and social justice that fuelled our initial push for more and improved language options in schools has grown to an awareness that multicultural Victoria is part of an interconnected global environment of risk and opportunity.

In this scoping research paper, we have produced an initial mapping of language policies in Victorian schools compared to other states and two examples of international best practice. It is a template to encourage discussion on our local language education policies among our stakeholders, the government and schools within a national and international perspective.

Many Victorians, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds, already understand the challenges and advantages that early language learning can bring to each individual. Learning a second, third or fourth language at school is not only a resource, a skill and a qualification to engage more freely across the diverse communities living in Victoria; it is a passport to participate in a globalised workforce. It develops a cultural literacy which is being recognised as a characteristic of career development and employment opportunity.

The cultural capacity that bi- and multilingual Victorians develop, strengthens our relationships across borders in our personal and professional lives. These relationships can enrich our state's culture, shape the investment ties that create jobs, support our social cohesion and motivate students.

Our policy intern Angela Sterjova from Deakin University, who researched and wrote this paper, is a great example of the insight and commitment of multilingual Victorians poised to inherit the opportunities of an interconnected world. We thank her and ECCV staff for the work they have done on this paper, and the stakeholders who generously made time for the consultations which inform this paper.

We hope you find gaps, perspectives, best practices and opportunities that we have missed and throw yourself into discussing issues that matter. Language policies for Victorian schools are not a side issue. For far-sighted policy makers and curriculum development experts, they are about the whole person, the whole state and, and indeed, the whole nation.



Eddie Micallef
Chairperson
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Participation in language education classes in Victorian schools has been declining for a number of years. Attempts have recently been made by previous and current Victorian Government's to increase the number of students undertaking languages education in Victoria.

Through an analysis of local and international language education policies, think tank research, and interviews with various stakeholders, this scoping paper will provide ECCV with a wide range of information regarding the potential workforce and employment opportunities that an expanded languages education program will provide to Victorian school students.

The document will begin with a review of the following government documents: *The Victorian Government's Vision for Languages Education, Languages- Expanding your world: Plan to implement The Victorian Government's Vision for Languages Education in 2013-2025, Education State Consultation Paper* and *Education State Schools Consultation Paper*. Secondly, language education policies of other Australian states as well as international policy papers from England and New Zealand will also be analysed to provide a comparison and highlight where Victorian students sit in relation to their interstate and international counterparts.

The document will then look at the linking of languages education with vocational education courses and discuss the potential benefits that this brings about to students future employment pathways. How the linking of languages education with vocational educational courses can also benefit multicultural and CALD students will also be discussed. The results and recommendations from consultations with relevant stakeholders will then be discussed leading to guiding questions for future discussions.

Finally, a conclusion and future directions on the importance of innovative language education in Victorian schools and the repercussions that poor languages policy can have on the future of a successful multicultural community in Australia will be highlighted to inform the development of an ECCV policy position paper. Whilst the literature on the benefits of languages education on students and the current state of languages education in Victoria and Australia is widespread, this document intends to provide a snapshot and baseline to discuss opportunities through the secondary school vocational pathways to cultivate a multilingual workforce.

BACKGROUND

Australia is a country of great diversity. In Victoria alone more than 200 languages are spoken and over 40 per cent of Victorians have at least one parent born outside of Australia.¹ Whilst Victoria continues to have the highest participation rate in languages education anywhere in Australia, the number of students studying languages has continued to decline over recent years.² Between 1999 and 2010 primary-level participation in languages education in Victoria fell from 88.7 per cent to 69.4 per cent.³ As a result:

- The percentage of primary schools offering languages programs increased from 60.1 per cent in to 73.5 per cent⁴
- The percentage of primary students studying languages increased from 55.5 per cent to 68.1 per cent⁵
- The percentage of secondary schools offering language programs increased from 86.5 per cent to 88.2 per cent⁶
- The percentage of secondary students studying languages decreased slightly from 41.7 per cent to 41.5 per cent⁷
- The number of students studying languages through community language institutions increased slightly from 15,586 students to 15,681 students.⁸

In terms of the legislative framework within which languages education is provided in Victoria, the requirement of schools to address languages as a learning area is required by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority and the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.⁹ Whilst there was some confusion in October 2015 over the direction of the Government's languages education policy,¹⁰ the government will continue to expand its languages education policy with its Education State curriculum.¹¹

¹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Languages-expanding your world, Plan to implement The Victorian Government's Vision for Languages Education 2013-2025*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne, 2013, p. 7.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. p. 3.

⁴ Ibid. p. 13.

⁵ Ibid. p. 26.

⁶ Ibid. p. 14.

⁷ Ibid. p. 35.

⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Languages Provision in Victorian Government Schools, 2014*, Department of Education and Training, Melbourne, 2015, p. 45.

⁹ Department of Education and Training, 'Languages', *Department of Education and Training* [website], 2015, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/languages/Pages/default.aspx>>, accessed 30 November 2015.

¹⁰ F. Tomazin, 'The language dilemma: Andrews dumps ambitious targets for schools', *The Age*, 11 October 2015, <<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/the-language-dilemma-andrews-dumps-ambitious-target-for-schools-20151002-gk056l.html>>, accessed 20 November 2015.

¹¹ Modern Languages Teachers Association of Victoria, 'The Hon James Merlino MP', *Modern Languages Teachers Association of Victoria* [website], 2015, <https://www.mltav.asn.au/images/stories/Letter_Minister_Nov_2015.jpeg>, accessed 5 December 2015.

This expansion provides great opportunities for multicultural and multilingual youth in Victoria. With globalisation only set to grow, coupled with an increase in Australia’s free trade agreements, and Asia being expected to provide 51% of Australia’s GDP by 2050,¹² “there is a compelling case for Australian businesses to adopt a globalised approach to their operations.”¹³ Companies with bilingual and culturally literate employees will also have a “strong competitive edge in a market where national borders are no longer a barrier to expansion.”¹⁴ As such, languages education provides a unique opportunity for Victoria’s multicultural community and monolingual community to develop its language capabilities to improve workplace participation and have a positive impact upon Victoria’s local and international economy. A 2016 ECCV Intern policy scoping paper uses the case study of learning Mandarin in Victoria to explore this in greater depth in *Stepping Up To Mandarin: The Twin Benefits of Community and Trade Languages*.

KEY POLICY REPORTS

The Victorian Governments Vision for Languages Education

The Victorian Governments Vision for Languages Education is based upon the notion that languages education in Victorian schools is not merely an optional extra for students- rather that it is an essential aspect of the curriculum.¹⁵ According to the document, not only does languages education provide benefits to school aged children in their academic life (for example through improved first language literacy and problem solving skills), it also assists students in their future lives through improved intercultural and communication skills.¹⁶ Most importantly of all, however, languages education “contributes to social cohesion, underpins Victoria’s increasingly globalised and export-orientated economy and enables speakers of the languages to maintain or reclaim their languages.”¹⁷

In regards to social cohesion, the Victorian Governments Vision for Languages Education also highlights that:

- Languages education offers students new ways of understanding their own identity and culture and the cultural perspectives of others.¹⁸
- Languages education underpins social cohesion because it supports communication and respect across cultures.¹⁹

¹² Department of Education, Training and Employment, *Global Schools, Creating successful global citizens*, Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2014, p.3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *The Victorian Government’s Vision for Languages Education*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne, 2011, p. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

- [Languages education creates] a multilingual society through increased communication and improved languages education will also deliver benefits to the Victorian economy.²⁰
- Victoria faces a shortage of languages teachers, particularly in regional and rural areas. This shortage of languages teachers may have the potential to affect social cohesion mechanisms such as language translation services in the future.²¹

Due to the importance of languages learning in not only the Victorian economy, but also ultimately on social cohesion of the state, the Victorian Governments Vision for Languages Education highlights the former governments ultimate target of “ensuring that compulsory languages classes are a reality in every Victorian government schools, by developing a plan to provide languages education for all prep to year 10 students by 2025.”²²

The key principles with which the policy was created was based upon Participation, Quality, Diversity and Partnership.

- **Participation** in the document refers to the “provisions of quality, compulsory languages education to all government schools students in prep-year 10”
- **Quality**- refers to the fact that programs “will be underpinned by flexible delivery, effective use of online resources, best practice teaching and provision of regular opportunities”
- **Diversity** – refers to “work with their school community to select languages that suit their context”
- **Partnership**- “locally driven partnerships across sectors, with surrounding and feeder schools, including between government and non- government schools, sister schools, foreign governments and other partners”²³

Under the plan, schools were not to be directed to teach any particular languages, however, the government was to work with schools to assist them in assessing their languages education options and “provide them with an understanding of the language needs of Victorian business today and into the future.”²⁴ Such a focus on providing understanding for “Victorian business” may highlight a tendency of the government to want to encourage the education of trade languages, however, this is not explicitly mentioned in the document. Further to this, the document detailed a continuing support for community language schools (including the Victorian School of Languages) through an increase of funding from \$120 per student to \$190 per student as well as better rental agreement frameworks for mainstream and community language schools.²⁵

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. p. 5.

²² Ibid. p. 7.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 9.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 10.

In order to develop best practice models to be utilised within Victorian schools, the Victorian Government also set up 14 clusters of schools to participate in language education projects. The results of the project, coupled with content and language integration teaching was intended to be utilised to assist in shaping languages education classes for Victorian schools.²⁶ Further to this, the government also provided \$100,000 in grants to support the “development of learning resources and pilot new teaching programs in...both metropolitan and regional sites...”²⁷. In order to address the shortage of language teachers the document also details scholarship initiatives for undergraduate and teachers already qualified to study languages to become qualified language teachers.²⁸

Languages – Expanding Your World: Plan to implement The Victorian Government’s Vision for Languages Education 2013-2025

In order for languages education programs in Victorian schools to provide the best opportunities for students to become workforce ready, quality provisions must be addressed to ensure for a high quality program. The Victorian governments, ‘*Languages- expanding your world*’ (date) policy document, highlights key language programs objectives that also focussed on the quality of content delivered. These areas are listed below:

Objectives currently in place include:

- \$6 million languages teaching scholarship program to increase the number of qualified languages teachers²⁹
- Partnership with the University of Melbourne to place current university students either studying languages or with first language skills in classrooms as “languages assistants” to provide additional support for students³⁰
- The use of “new approaches” to maximise the way in which language assistants are utilised in Victorian schools³¹
- The continuing of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses through the University of Melbourne, which helps language educators to “teach subjects such as mathematics, science and history in and through the chosen language”³²

Future objectives may include the following strategies:

- Identify good practice in early years programs, (including those taught in the community languages sector)³³

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Languages-expanding your world, Plan to implement The Victorian Government’s Vision for Languages Education 2013-2025*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne, 2013, p. 3.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 12.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. p. 11.

- Provide a leading languages module to “assist teachers and leaders to create and sustain the organisational conditions that are necessary to provide exemplarily language and literacy practice in their schools”³⁴
- Develop a group of language maintenance and refresher programs which will assist and support languages teachers to upgrade/refresh their languages skills. Also use such programs to attract Victorians with language education qualifications who no longer teach languages back into languages education³⁵
- Inform training institutions of the “strategies, resources and supports for languages learning in schools and early childhood settings...”³⁶
- Work collaboratively with tertiary providers to strengthen languages education programs³⁷
- Use the results of the “innovative languages provision in clusters (ILPIC) initiative” to “strengthen collaboration and continuity of languages education across groups of schools”³⁸

Education State

According to the Department of Education and Training “The Education State consultation is an opportunity for all Victorians to have their say on what is working well in our education system, and how we can make it even better.”³⁹ Education State will eventually form the new curriculum for Victorian public schools. This new curriculum (which is currently in its consultation stage) will dictate the future languages education policy in Victoria.

A) Education State Consultation Paper

Throughout the entire consultation paper the term ‘languages’ is only mentioned once, on page 13⁴⁰ in relation to how students can achieve excellence. There is no elaboration as yet, on how this excellence will be achieved or measured. The term ‘multicultural’ or ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ (CALD) is not mentioned in the document at all.

B) Education State Schools Consultation Paper

The term ‘language’ is mentioned twice throughout this paper. It is first mentioned on page 10 of the document when the paper discusses “what excellence will look like.”⁴¹ It is important to note, however, that whilst languages are listed as a subject within which

³⁴ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 13.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 14.

³⁹ Department of Education and Training, ‘About Us’, *Education State* [website], n.d, <<http://educationstate.education.vic.gov.au/about-us>>, accessed 2 December 2015.

⁴⁰ Department of Education and Training, *The Education State, Consultation Paper*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne, 2015, p. 13.

⁴¹ Department of Education and Training, *The Education State, Schools Consultation Paper*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne, 2015, p. 10.

excellence will be achieved, they are not listed in the proposed targets within this section. An increased proportion of students in the top bands of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is listed as a target instead.⁴²

Languages are mentioned once more in the document in reference to a case study about Doveton College. It states that the school offers languages classes to adults.⁴³ As ECCV is looking at the current state of languages education programs being delivered to Victorian school students, this case study did not appear to be relevant for the purposes of this report.

Points for consideration

It appears that, at least in the initial consultation stages of the Education State curriculum, that languages education and multicultural and culturally diverse engagement has been overlooked. There is also little in the way of *quality* measures in relation to languages education other than to achieve 'excellence' with no information on what excellence means and no information on what objectives will be implemented to bring about this excellence. As the curriculum is still in the initial stages of planning, it is uncertain whether this lack of priority for languages and multicultural and culturally diverse engagement will continue throughout the curriculum's development.

INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERSTATE POLICIES

This paper will now review international and interstate language policy papers to provide a comparison as to where Victorian language education policy sits within interstate and international counterparts.

INTERNATIONAL

ENGLAND

Born Global is the current major research policy project being undertaken by the British Academy's language programme.⁴⁴ According to the academy, "the project aims to provide a new paradigm for evidence used policy development engaging key stakeholders from education and employment in a radical rethinking of languages education for the 21st century."⁴⁵ Whilst the project is ongoing, the academy has released its interim findings, which are detailed below.

It is interesting to note that like Victoria, the proportion of English students studying languages in British secondary schools has decreased from 76% in 2002, to 43% in 2010.⁴⁶ At

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 31.

⁴⁴ The British Academy, *Born Global, Summary of Interim Findings*, The British Academy, 2014, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 8.

the same time, however, the independent schools sector seemed to be prioritising languages education and the percentage of students studying a language increased from 75% in 2004 to 89% in 2010.⁴⁷ According to the report, not only does increased language skills offer more promising employment perspectives,⁴⁸ but also “seven out of ten businesses said that they valued foreign language skills in their employees... [as] language skills were particularly useful in building relationships with clients, customers and suppliers and assisting staff mobility within the organisation.”⁴⁹

The shortage of foreign languages skills was also evidenced amongst a full range of occupational categories, not merely those in higher occupational categories.⁵⁰ As a result, the continued decline in languages education in the UK disproportionately affects pupils from the poorest backgrounds or attending schools in disadvantaged areas⁵¹ as language skills are needed across a wide range of employment.⁵² As a result, the academy believed that such findings “strengthened the case for a languages for all policy.”⁵³ This was further supported by the British Chambers of Commerce that called for languages education to be part of the teaching curriculum “until the age of seventeen” in a “proactive attempt to introduce cultural improvements and strengthen national language capability.”⁵⁴

The lack of multilingual speakers throughout the UK was also hurting the country’s economy with the report finding that the “assumption” that everyone speaks English was costing the UK economy around “48BN pounds a year, or 3.5% of GDP.”⁵⁵ The continued decrease in multilingual speakers will also create difficulty for future job markets. The report highlighted that the lower rate of students studying languages at university means that there would be a decline in the amount of future “specialist linguists.”⁵⁶ This would in turn “affect the future supply of teachers, translators and interpreters; reducing the UK capacity to influence in the field of international diplomacy; threatening [the UK’s] security; and minimising [the UK’s] capability to engage with international research, requiring advanced knowledge of languages other than English.”⁵⁷

Languages learning was also recognised as being paramount for cross-cultural understanding. The report highlighted how a lack of exposure to languages learning advances a “mono-cultural and monolingual attitude that tends to fossilise in the mind.”⁵⁸ In multicultural societies, such attitudes inhibit a person’s ability and willingness to acquire

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 16.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 9.

⁵² Ibid. p. 16.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 15.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 12-13.

“international connections” and communicate with those from different cultures.⁵⁹ In an ever global world, however, the ability to “communicate and adapt to different cultural codes of practice has become a fundamental skill”⁶⁰ and as such students and young people that “connect with others through their languages and through a shared understanding of diverse cultures are at an advantage in the global labour market over their monolingual peers.”⁶¹ This is particularly the case when it comes to client relations, as communicating in the local language was an “essential attribute” for maintaining client bonding and “sustaining business, making companies memorable, trustworthy and competitive.”⁶²

The report ultimately concluded that within the context of education reform, whilst it was time to have a national conversation regarding languages and its place in British society, that the debate should not become narrowed and “too inward looking.”⁶³ The report also highlighted that there was benefit in “exploring how language learning could fit into a broader matrix of employability skills, while still retaining its academic rigour.”⁶⁴ Such an angle may also assist in further developing ECCV’s policy paper regarding the future of languages education in Victoria.

NEW ZEALAND

The Language Nest Program in New Zealand sought to provide early childhood immersion programs for young children in two First Nations Communities. The report analysing the program titled “Language Nest Programs in BC” pointed out in its introduction the fact that language is often recognised as the most “tangible symbols” of a culture or community and that without the continuation of language education and use from one generation to the next, that it is likely that “the culture would die out within a few generations.”⁶⁵ As immersion programs are “the most effective method for creating fluent language speakers in a short time period,”⁶⁶ coupled with the fact that early childhood is considered the best time for language learning,⁶⁷ meant that the language nest program was attempted in an early childhood setting.

It is important to note that contrary to popular belief, the report indicated that not only do children *not* suffer from bilingualism so long as they continue to learn both languages,⁶⁸ but

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 21.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. p. 23.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 32.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ O. McIvor, *Language Nest Programs in BC, Early childhood immersion programs in two First Nations Communities. Practical questions answered and guidelines offered*, First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Culture Council, 2006, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 7.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 13.

that research has also shown that literacy skills that are obtained in a mother tongue are “readily transferable to a second language.”⁶⁹

The impact on the language nest immersion program on the children and the wider community was considerable. Not only was the children’s self-esteem, pride and positive feelings about their culture increased,⁷⁰ but those involved within the program found the children developed a “bigger worldview, were more in touch with the earth and were more respectful.”⁷¹ The program also assisted in further fostering, and at times developing, the first nation community. Parents that were interviewed highlighted that they were learning the language from their children in their home environment, and one exercise in which the children were given culturally appropriate names became a kind of “unexpected community development exercise” as many families “had to consult with their relatives for appropriate names.”⁷²

The program, however, was not without some difficulty. The ability to find an educator who was not only fluent in the language but who also had appropriate certifications was highlighted in the report as one of the main challenges when setting up and maintaining the language nest immersion program.⁷³ Such an issue draws parallels to the current Victorian language curriculum where a shortage in language teachers in the state (particularly in rural areas) means that students are provided with less of an opportunity to acquire bilingual skills. The report also highlighted how interactive social speech was key when seeking to bring about successful language acquisition.⁷⁴ As such, in order for these languages to continue to survive children in these communities must not only be taught the language, but strategies must be taken towards “reinstating indigenous languages into common, everyday use in order that they become viable.”⁷⁵

Such a positive preliminary result from the language nest program may prove beneficial not only to Victoria’s own community and indigenous languages speakers; but for language education programs in general, where immersion programs in early childhood settings can best support bilingual acquisition at a prime moment in the individual’s learning development.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 22.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. p. 14.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 25.

NATIONAL

OVERVIEW

Teachers and the education sector in Australia are on the frontline of changing languages policy. *Australian Teacher* magazine's (2016 February) cover story 'Why Learning a Second Language is Vital to Our Global Future' looks at the current state and future needs of languages education in Australia.

According to the report, Australians speak more than 350 languages in home and the work force.⁷⁶ Not only do those who speak a second language have different brains from those of monolingual speakers, but also the ability to speak a second language actually becomes a "great asset to the cognitive process."⁷⁷ It also allows for greater communication amongst more people in an ever-globalized world.⁷⁸ Most importantly, however, languages education assists in bringing about greater intercultural understanding.⁷⁹ According to Professor Lo Bianco who was also interviewed for the article, the ability to actually understand the language of the trading partner, and society and culture provides a greater advantage over those who do not.⁸⁰ This is due to the fact that languages are more than just the "words that come out of your mouth."⁸¹

According to the article, the current issues in languages education policy in Australia are both socioeconomic and policy based. Not only was there a constant changing of languages education policies, but there are also issues with the 'one size fits all' approach of language teaching. This may impact upon the quality of language education students ultimately receive.⁸² Issues also arise when students move from primary school into high school. If the language taught in high school is different to that taught in primary school, students are required to commence again which impacts upon how well they are able to develop proficiency in a second language.⁸³

There were also concerns regarding socioeconomic inequalities. According to Professor Lo Bianco, the most effective languages education was being provided to middle class students that were quite 'well off' and he believed that this barrier needed to be broken so that there was a more equal opportunity for all students to benefit from a languages education program.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ R. Vukovic, 'Why Learning a Second Language is Vital to Our Global Future', *Australian Teacher*, Feb. 2016, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 23.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

According to the article, Victoria is currently the leader in languages education, with it being the only state to have an explicit goal of having all students learning a language from prep to year 10 by 2025.⁸⁵ This, however, is dependent upon the Andrews government keeping these targets. In Western Australia, for example, less than half of its public schools offer a languages education program and a quarter of all primary schools do not offer a languages education program at all.⁸⁶

Interestingly, the report highlighted how English was not the most spoken language in the world and came 3rd to both Chinese and Spanish.⁸⁷ This further highlights the need for a quality languages education program to ensure that Australian and Victorian students remain globally competitive.

QUEENSLAND

The Queensland state government has released its consultation draft titled *'Global Schools- Creating successful global citizens'* as part of its updated languages education strategy.

According to the report the main aims of the policy is to ensure that:

- By 2016 100% of Queensland state schools will commence implementation of the Australian Curriculum: Languages
- By 2025 100% of Queensland state primary schools will offer languages from prep
- By 2025 15% of students completing year 12 will be studying a second language.⁸⁸

The draft stated that “skills in languages provide personal, social and employment benefits. For students, quality languages education enhances understanding of their own language and culture and assists them to reflect on their identity and place in the world.”⁸⁹ Not only can learning an additional language increase an individual’s interest in multicultural affairs, it can also “strengthen general literacy skills and students understanding of their first language... [and] offer a new beginning and potential success for learners who may have experienced difficulties with English.”⁹⁰

Languages education also benefits the broader community from the flow on effect that the development of cultural literacy and capability creates in Queensland students. As such, in order for students and the wider community to be provided these opportunities, an approach to languages education that is international and recognises the importance of

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 22

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Department of Education, Training and Employment, *Global Schools, Creating successful global citizens*, Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2014, p.10.

⁸⁹ Department of Education, Training and Employment, *Languages in Queensland state schools*, Department of Education, Training and Employment, n.d, p.1.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 2.

quality languages education as well as “intercultural experiences throughout their schooling” is key to ensuring that children develop the global skills that they need.⁹¹

The draft highlighted a necessity in teaching languages in “authentic contexts, including culturally appropriate behaviours” so as to demonstrate appropriate uses of the language within applicable social contexts.⁹² Not only does this enhance the individual’s learning and comprehension of the language based on whom they communicate with, but also expands on the cultural knowledge students obtain through developing like-language skills and social norms. Such a view and strategy ultimately provides for the ‘cultural understanding’ that the Victorian Government seeks to bring about, and recognises that languages education (particularly languages education that is culturally appropriate) is what brings about this cultural understanding in the first place.

The draft also recognised the necessity in quality provisions (such as improved teaching skills, structured curriculums, classroom time devoted to languages, teacher proficiency and quality resources) to ensure that students were equipped with the tools and resources to absorb the material presented to them. The use of technology to deliver distance education to students who may otherwise not be provided an opportunity to learn languages was highlighted as a further platform to allow students and classes to “connect with their teachers in real-time, as well as completing materials for individual study.”⁹³

The use of such technology will ensure that students are not held back from being provided languages education due to their living arrangements. The draft found that language skills were best developed “over an extended period of time” and should be continued through to year 12 to ensure that students are provided the best opportunity to become proficient in the languages they learn.⁹⁴ As a result, it would seem that there would need to be a coordinated approach across the entire school life of a child.

With a rapidly increasing amount of migrants relocating to Australia, it is beneficial that “many of our schools are using their languages program to build international relationships to provide students with opportunities to connect with their peers across the globe”, eliminating language barriers and cultural stigma.⁹⁵ Additionally, “through acknowledging the diversity of languages and culture already in our school communities we can find new ways of tapping into the cultural capital that already exists in every school.”⁹⁶ This will not only improve the rate of Australian born students learning other languages; it will also

⁹¹ Department of Education, Training and Employment, *Global Schools, Creating successful global citizens*, Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2014, p.3.

⁹² Department of Education, Training and Employment, *Languages in Queensland state schools*, Department of Education, Training and Employment, n.d, p.2.

⁹³ Department of Education, Training and Employment, *Global Schools, Creating successful global citizens*, Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2014, p.5.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 8.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 9.

provide an opportunity for Australian students to develop a greater bond as well as greater understanding and appreciation for culturally diverse students on their own language journey.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Language education was considered a compulsory part of the Western Australian curriculum until 2010 when a change of policy by the education department meant that schools could be “more flexible” on whether or not they provided a language education program to their students.⁹⁷ As a result of this policy change, “more than a quarter of WA’s public primary schools no longer teach students a foreign language, even though four years ago all of them did.”⁹⁸

In 2012, 61,000 public primary and high school students studied an Asian language.⁹⁹ By 2013, however, this number had dropped to 59,400.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, the number of students studying European languages fell from 50,000 to 48,000.¹⁰¹ Interestingly, however, almost all private catholic and independent schools have continued to offer languages education to their students.¹⁰² As such, a softening of approach on languages education in Western Australia appears to have led to an increase in inequality between both private and public school students where public schools have not prioritised the continuation of languages education for their students as a result of more relaxed government legislation, but private school providers continue to do so for their students. What this can create is an uneven job skills market, where those who have higher incomes are provided with a better and more globalised education and as a result are more employable in the job market, while those whom socioeconomic circumstances have led to public schools may have, as a result, reduced their opportunities within a future globalised workforce.

INSIGHTS FROM VICTORIAN STAKEHOLDERS

The following insights represent the views of a selection of key stakeholders on language policies in Victorian schools who returned enquiries from ECCV with consultation. These include The University of Melbourne’s School of Language and Literacy Education, the Modern Languages Teachers Association of Victoria, the Independent Schools Association, the Modern Languages Teachers Association of Victoria, and past language students. Some key stakeholder consultations did not respond and it is recommended that further

⁹⁷ B. Hiatt, ‘Schools cut foreign languages’, *The West Australian*, 31 July 2014, <<https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/wa/a/24592129/schools-cut-foreign-languages/>>, accessed 28 November 2015.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

consultation be held with them and that they are included in further conversations on language policies in Victorian schools.

These include The Department of Education and Training, The Victorian School of Languages and The Ethnic Schools Association Victoria. While none of these stakeholders returned ECCV's enquiries, The Ethnic Schools Association Victoria did highlight a letter sent to them from the Minister for Education, which was also sent to The Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria. Lalor North Primary School did not return enquiries for this document but are noted as a best practice school.

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EDUCATION, THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Key Themes include:

- Focus on trade languages education at the expense of community languages
- Impact of governments constantly changing languages education policies
- Indicators of a *quality* language education program
- Socioeconomic impacts on languages education programs
- Importance of continuing community languages education

Consultation was held with the School of Language and Literacy Education (LLE) at The University of Melbourne in relation to the state of language education programs in Australia. According to LLE, language education policy in the last 15 years has been “too focussed on the development and teaching of commerce, trade, and foreign affairs languages and as a result community languages have since fallen off the agenda.” There is a common perception that language policy is popular and continually supported by the government, however the direction of such policies has not really been community based. As a result, most schools have pushed trade languages and there has been little planning with the ethnic schools system. The community aspect of languages education in Victoria needs to be addressed and revived.

In relation to past government policies in language education LLE believed that there had been far too much focus on numbers and numbers targets and not enough focus on quality. In saying that, however, targets should not be abandoned, as targets are a mechanism that policy makers can measure success against, but no state or federal government has met its languages target since 1999. There needed to be a pause to the amount of chopping and changing of languages education policy. Greater funding and better use of resources was a priority.

In relation to questions regarded the nature of a “quality” language program, LLE¹⁰³ highlighted that it came down to the hours per week that were devoted to the program, what work is done in that time, and what were the innovative aspects to the program. Children, he believed, were well aware of what was a good language program. Poor quality

¹⁰³ ECCV interviewed Professor Lo Bianco from the LLE for this research scoping paper.

programs led to children noticing the fact that it was poor and discontinuing, whereas a high investment in languages led to more children continuing with the program. Schools whose languages funding was external were also more likely to discontinue programs when provided an opportunity to do so.

In relation to the impacts that languages education has on the future employability of students, LLE highlighted a continued theme evident throughout the literature of the impact that languages education has on both private and public schools. There was no accident in the way that public schools and disadvantaged areas struggled to keep their languages programs afloat with the wealthiest of schools offering upwards of 4 or 5 languages. There is a clear socioeconomic parallel between language provision and the socio-economics of the school. This was regarded as unjust as all students throughout Victoria have the capabilities to acquire bilingual language skills. This division of quality amongst language programs becomes further highlighted once students finish school as they are given an extra advantage from other students.

The provision of languages education also provides extra benefits to migrant and newly arrived students. LLE's research highlights that children that are able to maintain both their first languages as well as English are better learners of a third language. As a result, disadvantaged migrant children can get a big advantage and excel from quality languages education programs.

Quality languages education programs are beneficial to society as a whole. Whilst LLE's Professor Lo Bianco believed that the Andrews government would continue to link language benefits to trade, employment advantages do not just link to trade. It should start off with strong message of community languages. From economic advantages, to social cohesion, empathy building to bilingual interpreters and small business, the encouragement and support for community languages provides benefits for Victoria internally that should not be disregarded when looking at the benefits of language education internationally.

Consultation with LLE ultimately highlighted that Victorian and Australian school students were falling behind against their international counterparts. Professor Lo Bianco stated that he has released two new reports called "Second languages and Australian schooling" in the Australian Council of Education as well as an analysis as to what should be done about language policy in the Australian Mosaic released by The Federation of Ethnic Communities (FECCA).

MODERN LANGUAGES TEACHERS ASSOCIATION VICTORIA

Key themes include:

- Languages to be expanded and strengthened
- Government consultations

The Modern Language Teachers ' Association of Victoria (MLTAV) is a professional association for language teachers and plays a key role in encouraging and promoting the learning of languages as an essential part of the school curriculum. The organisation directed ECCV to a letter and response they had sent and received reply from by the Minister for Education, James Merlino.

According to the Minister for Education, "Education State sets out the Andrews Labor Government's commitment to support all students to reach their potential by giving them access to quality education ... This includes languages programs."¹⁰⁴ The Minister also stated that "the Victorian Government will expand and strengthen languages education as part of our broader Education State reform agenda."¹⁰⁵ As the preliminary consultation papers for Education state highlighted earlier however, languages education is not currently a major focus in the development of this curriculum.

The letter concludes with a statement by the minister that he "will be seeking input over the coming months from key stakeholders..."¹⁰⁶ ECCV may be well placed to enquire as to the timing of stakeholder meetings and ultimately also provide input to the department on the views and concerns of culturally diverse Victorian communities.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA

Key themes include:

- Every independent school required to provide languages education to students
- Types of languages taught
- Most schools prioritise languages, however, Gonski reforms has changed funding arrangements and school language programs have suffered
- Victorian government language targets as a measure of performance

ECCV consulted with Independent Schools Victoria in relation to languages education services and its impacts on the independent school system.

According to the association, every independent school in Victoria is required to provide language education programs for students and as a result all schools endeavour to teach languages to their students. The priority of languages taught, however, varies from school to school. For example, Islamic schools may have a preference towards Arabic and Turkish and similarly Jewish schools might have a preference towards Yiddish and Hebrew. These languages are seen as central to the culture of the school. Other schools teach languages based on tradition. French, for example, is taught widely in the independent sector. Whilst

¹⁰⁴ Modern Languages Teachers Association of Victoria, 'The Hon James Merlino MP', *Modern Languages Teachers Association of Victoria* [website], 2015, <https://www.mltav.asn.au/images/stories/Letter_Minister_Nov_2015.jpeg>, accessed 5 December 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

most schools saw languages as a high priority in addition to the fact that it was one of the key 8 learning areas, the provision of languages education is not regarded highly in all schools and some schools would gladly drop their languages education programs if given the opportunity. As a result some language teachers in the independent sector would argue that they are under appreciated.

In relation to the funding that is provided for languages education programs, up until a few years ago, languages education was seen as a targeted program and funding was distributed to the school based on the requirements of that particular school. The ISV was required to complete a language survey in order to receive the funding and then distribute it as required to independent schools.

Since the introduction of Gonski, however, recommendation 6 highlighted that schools were best placed to decide where their money went. This means that funding now goes directly to schools and schools decide what subjects that money is best targeted towards. Languages education has suffered from this change. Despite this, there are a number of language initiatives in government departments and ISV acknowledged that government departments were good at being cross sectoral. The amount of languages initiatives that are utilised, however, depends on school to school.

In relation to the proposed changes to Victoria's languages policy the ISV stated that whilst independent schools were not required to follow the Victorian Governments curriculum or languages initiatives, many independent schools did use the targets as a way to measure their performance across the state. Independent schools believed that the targets and initiatives set forth by the previous government were well placed and a good target to move towards. Now that targets have disappeared, however, there is no guarantee that independent schools will continue toward them.

According to ISV, the languages survey that they produced as recently as a few years ago held a lot of information regarding statistics in relation to languages education programs in independent schools. Such statistics may be important for ECCV to highlight best practice examples and understand the way in which independent schools are providing languages education programs to their students.

PAST STUDENTS

Key themes include:

- Benefit of bilingual immersion programs
- The structure of classes at the Victorian School of Languages
- The need to change the attitude towards languages education

CASE STUDY: FORMER LANGUAGE STUDENT INTERVIEW

A phone call consultation was made with a current university student and past languages education student to gain a student's perspective as to the ways in which languages education in Victoria can be enhanced to lead to better outcomes and results of language teaching and proficiency for Victorian government school students. This past student was chosen for the consultation due to the fact that the student had engaged with 4 streams of languages education throughout their schooling. This was first as a student in a bilingual immersion school, then as a student in language classes formed as part of the curriculum, then as a student within the Victorian School of Languages, and finally as a student completing a language at VCE level.

The bilingual language education program that this student participated in taught Macedonian. There were three language programs at Lalor North Primary: a bilingual Greek immersion program, a bilingual Macedonian immersion program and a standard Italian language class for students who were not enrolled in either immersion program. During years prep to grade 3, language education classes as well as maths and science classes were taught in Macedonian. In grades 4-6 these classes were taught in English. Language education classes were taught every day throughout primary school for those enrolled in the program.

When the student commenced high school she continued her Macedonian language education classes through the Victorian School of Languages as her high school taught French instead. The student felt that she was a lot more proficient than other students in her VSL class due to her participation in the bilingual program throughout primary school. Whilst she believed that the bilingual program immensely assisted her in developing proficiency in Macedonian she remarked that only 1 person in the program was from a non-Macedonian background and that it was not a program that was widely known about in the school or local community.

When the student moved to high school a lack of Macedonian language classes offered at her school meant that she needed to continue her language education through the Victorian School of Languages. As the high school taught French, the student learnt French as part of her curriculum and attended VSL classes on Saturday mornings. The student found that whilst French was a new language for her and was different to Macedonian, she found it easier than other students to pick up the language due to her involvement in the bilingual immersion program in primary school. At the same time, however, the student admitted to being more serious about her French studies during school hours than her Macedonian classes on the weekends.

According to the student, it was easier to see French as an "actual" subject as it was being taken during school hours. As VSL was on the weekends, the student initially saw Macedonian classes as a waste of time, extra schooling and did not want to attend school 6

days a week. In relation to how VSL classes were run, however, the student felt that it was a lot easier to be taught through an immersion model than in VSL. The fact that VSL classes were separated based on the students actual year level as opposed to their language speaking ability meant that there was a varied level of speakers in the class, which made it difficult for those with low levels of fluency and frustrating for those with higher levels of fluency.

The student suggested that VSL classes could be improved if the classes were separated based on proficiency of the language spoken rather than the student's year level. Similarly, however, other students also saw VSL classes as an "extra-curricular" activity rather than a proper language class and were at times forced to go by their parents. By year 11 and 12, however, those students that found the work too difficult or were not interested in using the language class towards their VCE dropped out of the school. For those students that did commit to being enrolled in VSL, the workload was not seen as hard to juggle as the classes only accounted for an extra 3 hours of schooling. The student interviewed was also able to drop a subject in year 12 due to the fact that she was doing VSL on the weekends.

Knowing a second language through the bilingual immersion program helped the student to better understand how languages work and as a result learn even more languages. The student believed that if students were provided an opportunity to become bilingual at a young age that it would make it easier for them to learn other languages, as they got older.

The student did not, however, believe that providing students an opportunity to choose between VSL classes and languages offered by their high school, for example, would be beneficial as she believed that a number of students would pick VSL merely to have free periods during school and not take languages education seriously. She ultimately believed that there needed to be a wider attitude change towards languages education and languages teaching strategies. According to her, this could only happen during the first few years of schooling.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICIES IN VICTORIA

- Continued decrease in language education participation in Victoria and Australia
- A growing inequality between Victorian students whose access to languages education will be mostly based upon socioeconomic upbringing.
- Students will become less culturally engaged and culturally aware which will impact negatively upon social cohesion and multiculturalism in our community
- Increasing globalization means monolingual students may be left at a disadvantage in a future workforce

- Negative ramifications for current and future ethnic communities with a decrease in multilingual speakers leading to a decrease in multilingual community services like doctors, lawyers, bankers etc.
- Learning a new language is not easy. When students learn languages it allows them an opportunity to develop empathy towards, and a greater understanding of, ethnic communities in Australia on their own journey of languages education. A lack of this education may lead to less empathy towards migrants who are unable to properly communicate in English for example. It allows for greater respect for differences and cross cultural communication and understanding.
- The various policy reports highlighted throughout this document shows that cultural awareness develops as a result of language education. It is not something that can be developed separately to languages education. A push towards cultural awareness at the expense of proper languages education programs may negatively impact trade negotiations for Victoria and Australia alike and make us less globally competitive.
- ECCV continue to receive community feedback that young family members are providing unpaid translating and interpreting service to their parents and grandparents at a cost to their own education. Culturally diverse youth are an unacknowledged resource across government services in health care, aged care, justice and corrective services, consumer and financial transactions. Opportunities to embed qualifications for community languages into school curriculums offer an innovative pathway to rejuvenate the interpreter sector, reduce truancy rates and re-engage culturally diverse youth at risk of radicalization. This may strengthen intergenerational social cohesion.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY, THE LANGUAGE SECTOR AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Secondary school vocational pathways to address the unpaid language services provided by culturally diverse youth to family members

Secondary school vocational pathways in Victoria

Some resources exist to link languages education to vocational pathways while consultation with the Victorian Education Department has revealed ongoing interest in senior secondary certificates that recognise student achievement in some languages including work by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority on making Victorian Education Certificates (VCE) more innovative through relevant¹⁰⁷. Internationally recognised, the VCE is usually awarded in years 11 and 12 but can be started in Year 10. It can be linked to industry needs through School-Based Apprenticeships or at a registered training organisation (RTO) and therefore is open to adults and youth alike.

¹⁰⁷ Strengthening Senior Secondary Pathways, State of Victoria (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority) 2013.

Currently this work has produced the VCE Bacalaureate to encourage students to include languages into their senior secondary program of study while acknowledging that students with a deep intercultural understanding will support their vocational pathway development. At the same time, ECCV continue to receive community feedback that young family members are providing unpaid translating and interpreting service to their parents and grandparents at a cost to their own education. Culturally diverse youth are an unacknowledged resource across government services in health care, aged care, justice and corrective services, consumer and financial transactions. Opportunities to embed qualifications for community languages into school curriculums offer an innovative pathway to rejuvenate the interpreter sector, reduce truancy rates and re-engage culturally diverse youth at risk of radicalization. This may also strengthen intergenerational relationships within families that is understood to lead to breaks in social cohesion.

Where a general proficiency in more than one language is beneficial to students future employment opportunities, the linking of languages education and vocational education courses is a further way to recognise the workplace skills that are brought about by the study of languages and as such increase the rate of students completing languages education courses a way to bring about greater career opportunities. This in turn would address lack of interpreters and translators promised by numerous government recommendations such those in the Family Violence Commission report which recognizes the need for language and culturally appropriate services.

The linking of languages education and vocational education courses also provides benefits to schools offering such courses by increasing “the profile of languages in a school, and strengthen[ing] cross-curricular links.”¹⁰⁸ The linking of these two disciplines can also lead to increased student retention in classes by:

- “Making learning more relevant to students' needs;
- providing students with a clear learning pathway that can lead to a future career; and
- providing students with additional certification and credit towards their further education”¹⁰⁹

In Victoria, the linking of languages education and vocational courses is currently achieved through the VCE VET Applied Language course. This course “provide[s] participants with the language skills and cultural knowledge to enable them to communicate in social and workplace situations in a language other than English.”¹¹⁰ Though the VCE VET Applied

¹⁰⁸ Department of Education, Science and Training, *Linking Languages & Vocational Education Information for schools and vocational training providers, 2003*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *VCE VET Applied Language, 2014*, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Melbourne, 2014, p. 1.

Language course is vocationally based; it can also be used as credit towards students VCE if they elect to do so. For example:

- Students that complete the Certificate II in Applied Language will be eligible for two units of credit towards their VCE at Units 1 and 2 level.
- Students that complete the Certificate III in Applied Language are eligible for three units of credit towards their VCE: a Units 3 and 4 sequence and a Unit 3.¹¹¹

As a result, depending on the school they attend, students in Victorian secondary schools may have the option of participating only in languages education classes offered by their school, the VCE VET applied languages course, or they may elect to “undertake dual certification” and as mentioned above complete the VCE VET Applied Language course and also put that qualification towards their VCE.¹¹²

As the VCE VET Applied Languages Certificates offered at the successful completion of the course are not vocationally specific, it means that students can use this qualification and “make an informed choice of vocation or career path” that is right for them.¹¹³

Models where schools are encouraged “to related language learning to careers in general” have also led to greater student retention of the course and continue their languages education journey.¹¹⁴ For example, The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria found that “78% continued language study” into VCE when students were required to participate in work experience placements in year 10 that “require[d] them to make use of language and cultural skills.”¹¹⁵ As such, it would appear that the linking of languages education and vocational courses brings about increased student interest in language study.¹¹⁶ As a result, a continued expansion of vocational languages streams into Victorian Secondary Schools (as well as the introduction of the Certificate of Language Proficiency to be awarded at year 10 as indicated in the Victorian Government document *Languages- expanding your world*¹¹⁷) could provide greater opportunities for students to gain workplace qualifications during their studies and increase retention levels in languages classes.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 2.

¹¹² Department of Education, Science and Training, *Linking Languages & Vocational Education Information for schools and vocational training providers, 2003*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p. 45.

¹¹³ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, *VCE VET Applied Language, 2014*, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Melbourne, 2014, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Department of Education, Science and Training, *Linking Languages & Vocational Education Information for schools and vocational training providers, 2003*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Languages-expanding your world, Plan to implement The Victorian Government’s Vision for Languages Education 2013-2025*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Melbourne, 2013, p. 3.

Secondary school vocational pathways overseas

The United States of America also has a similar languages award with its Seal of Biliteracy. The Seal of Biliteracy “is an award given by a school, school district or county office of education in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation.”¹¹⁸ There are currently 23 states that have approved a statewide Seal of Biliteracy.¹¹⁹

The purpose of the seal is to:

- “To encourage students to study languages
- To certify attainment of biliteracy skills
- To recognize the value of language diversity
- To provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills
- To provide universities with a method to recognize and give credit to applicants for attainment of high level skills in multiple languages
- To prepare students with 21st century skills that will benefit them in the labor [sic] market and the global society
- To strengthen intergroup relationships and honor [sic] the multiple cultures and languages in a community.”¹²⁰

The Seal of Biliteracy is also awarded to students from non-English backgrounds that are able to master English by high school graduation, which highlights the bilingualism of a student’s home language.¹²¹ In Victoria particularly, where there are diverse multicultural and CALD communities, it is important to recognise and highlight the bilingualism (or at times even multilingualism) that is already apparent in some students.

Where the current VCE VET Applied Languages courses provide vocational qualifications to students that gain proficiency in languages taught within the secondary school, the Victorian Government may be well placed to provide vocational qualifications and recognition to students that have achieved the same level of competency required by the VCE VET Applied Languages course but that have done so in languages that may have been developed outside of the school system.

¹¹⁸ Seal of Biliteracy, ‘Steps to Implement the Seal of Biliteracy’, *Seal of Biliteracy* [website], n.d, <<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/steps>>, accessed 10 February 2017.

¹¹⁹ Seal of Biliteracy, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’, *Seal of Biliteracy* [website], n.d, <<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/faq#n16>>, accessed 10 February 2017.

¹²⁰ Seal of Biliteracy, ‘Steps to Implement the Seal of Biliteracy’, *Seal of Biliteracy* [website], n.d, <<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/steps>>, accessed 10 February 2017.

¹²¹ Seal of Biliteracy, ‘Frequently Asked Questions’, *Seal of Biliteracy* [website], n.d, <<http://sealofbiliteracy.org/faq#n17>>, accessed 10 February 2017.

This may also assist students whose home language is the same of that taught in their secondary school and allow such students to be instantly recognized for their language capabilities rather than completing a vocational languages course in a language they already know.

By recognizing and providing relevant qualifications to students from already bilingual or multilingual backgrounds, students (particularly those from multicultural or CALD communities), will be further exposed to the notion of languages being a workplace skill and will provide increased encouragement of such students to undertake further languages education in order to gain workplace ready qualifications. Such qualifications and recognition may also go a far way in encouraging and increasing the confidence of such students (particularly those from refugee and new and emerging communities) and highlight to them the skills and competencies they already have and bring to the table.

In order to continue highlighting languages education as a workplace skill it is ultimately important that the linking of languages education with vocational education courses continues to grow within Victoria's secondary schools and be expanded to include greater linkages with multicultural and CALD students. From ECCV's perspective, there is great potential for policy makers in government to work across government to address innovative programs that will remunerate youth for using their existing community language skills as translators and interpreters assisting family members to access government services.

ECCV and the broader community language sector agree that shortages in translators and interpreters will make it challenging for government to meet the commitment from initiatives such as the recommendations from the Commission for Family Violence for culturally diverse Victorian families.

CONCLUSION

Languages education policy in Victoria is currently at a crossroads. Where Victoria had previously been leading the change towards greater participation in language education programs, it now risks moving backwards in a similar fashion to Western Australia whose change of policy led to a sharp decrease in students undertaking the subject. Whilst it is unclear what priority languages education will place in Victoria's new Education State curriculum, what is clear from Victorian policy reports, interstate policy analyses and international policy papers, is that regardless of what policies the State government puts forth towards languages, the independent school sector will continue to highly prioritise the subject for its students.

Unless Victoria puts forward a quality languages education program that will provide all students an opportunity to become proficient in a second language, it is students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that will be at a disadvantage in a future job market. This will ultimately not only impact Victoria's economy, but will also impact upon its multicultural and culturally diverse community. This is due to the fact that whilst trade languages are important for establishing international negotiations between governments, community languages are still required for Victoria's local economy.

From lawyers, to tradesmen, to police officers, to interpreters and translators, the ability for Victoria to have a strong community language speaking population across all sections of society is vital for improving social cohesion, acceptance and cultural understanding.

As the various documents throughout this paper have highlighted, cultural understanding cannot be brought about separately to languages education, it is a part of languages education. It is only with a strong languages education program that Victoria will continue to truly be culturally understanding to not only its trade partners, but also its own multicultural community.

POTENTIAL FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Encourage a languages education program that not only improve improves the quality of the subject delivered but also improves the participation rate of students undertaking the subject as a way to bring about greater socioeconomic equality
- Highlight the fact that languages education is a necessary step in bringing about greater intercultural understanding
- Highlight the importance of languages education as a way to bring about greater empathy, respect and tolerance for Victoria's multicultural and culturally diverse community
- Highlight the importance of both trade and community languages on Victoria's local and international economy
- Bring to attention the negative future job market that Victorian students will face if languages education participation continues to decline
- Highlight the importance of languages education in improving social cohesion.
- Victorian Government to discuss opportunities to develop a secondary school vocational pathway for culturally diverse bilingual youth translating and interpreting for family members to enable them to be paid or accredited for their community language and cultural competence skills.

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