



The Association of French Teachers in Victoria  
Response to the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages

Overall, the draft paper is a laudable document. We praise it for what attempting to put Languages on the agenda and make it a national priority. However, the AFTV finds that priority on certain areas and languages is odd and is contrary to what language teachers are trying to achieve. The points below refer to our questions and concerns.

**Preamble**

Page 1

We feel that the term “bilingual (“Success in developing students’ bilingual capability...””) is potentially confusing and should be clarified.

Time allocation is a crucial issue. Number of hours, regularity and continuity need to be mandated to ensure both quality and equality of language acquisition.

**Introduction: history, challenge and an opportunity**

Page 3

2. It should be noted that studying a particular language in primary and secondary education may not lead to a future career using this language. However, being proficient in one language greatly accelerates a person’s competency in another.

3. This point should be included in another: why is it a separate point?

Page 4

5. Good paragraph

Page 5

9. “The Australian Curriculum: Languages is being developed on the assumption that all students will learn languages across primary and secondary schooling”

What is going to be done to ensure it actually happens? What financial assistance will be provided to teachers and schools in country areas where only part time positions can be offered or where teachers cannot be found?

Page 6

10. “it expects a substantial time allocation”

again – Time allocation is a crucial issue. Number of hours, regularity and continuity need to be mandated to ensure both quality and equality of language acquisition.

**Languages as a learning area in the Australian Curriculum**

Page 7

11. While it is essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders languages to be maintained and developed, it is also essential that significant funding in English as

Second Language (ESL) be provided to those communities. All students need to be highly functional in English in Australia.  
The provision of quality teaching and resourcing these languages will be very costly. Will the expenditure on these two be disproportionate or will all languages be treated equally.

12. This paragraph should be split in two as there are two points being developed:

- 1) Australia's distinct migration history
- 2) Australia's physical and geopolitical situation

The first point is a general (and excellent) statement on Australia. It is then followed by an overemphasis on Asian languages, which excludes all other communities which make up Australia's rich society.

There is already a significant investment in Asian languages. Has it been worth the investment? Has there been a growth in numbers? What about growth in other languages? Can they be compared?

We would prefer to see all languages treated equally rather than, it seems, some are to be accorded more time and/or money.

13. note typo: "and in Asia in particularly (sic)"

14. Double tick for this last paragraph: it seems to include every type of school and program.

### **A rationale for learning languages**

The AFTV hopes that the values of language learning mentioned in the rationale will be explained in more details and that examples will be provided to make it clearer. As language teachers we understand the value(s) expressed but we fear that principals, heads of curriculum and more importantly parents may not understand the "jargon".

Examples of elements which could be added to help the public understand this section:

- example of increased brain activity (figures for example)
- jobs that require the skills developed by being multi-lingual
- a few reasons why thinking flexibly is good, if possible with an example

Page 9

16. "a capability in English only is insufficient and that a bilingual or plurilingual capability has become the norm in most parts of the world"

This is a good statement and one to remind stakeholders constantly. However, Australians may need supporting evidence to be convinced that this is true and not simply an ideal.

Pages 9-10

17. The AFTV supports whole heartedly these dot points.

Making them less cryptic and easier to understand would be good. For example: "develops students' awareness of cultural assumptions and values that frame the world view shaped through their own first language(s) and culture(s)" could be followed by: "leading to a better self understanding" or something like that.

The statement that learning languages "strengthens the intellectual and analytical capability of students to engage with different ways of making meaning" should be linked with mathematical skills and understanding.

Some dot points that should be added to that list:

- helps (when) learn(ing) another language in the future. Because any language equips the learner with the skills needed to learn a subsequent language. Students learn how language works.
- helps students become world citizens – particularly crucial in a physically isolated country

Page 10

19. In the first and second last sentences the word 'Australian' is not needed as it excludes languages and cultures other than the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' ones. Then the last sentence could say "as for Australian languages, their ongoing and necessary reclamation and revitalisation..."

Please note: the AFTV really appreciates the quotes on pages 10 and 11 from Nelson 'Snooky' Varcoe and Joe Lo Bianco as these clarify the values of learning a language to the general community.

### **The distinctiveness of languages in the curriculum**

23. This is a great paragraph. For non-teachers it could gain in clarity by being worded a bit differently and/or an example could be provided.

### **Key concepts and understandings in learning languages**

Language

That section is excellent, though again, maybe a bit too academic. It may need clarifying for those not directly involved with language teaching. It is vital that the general public is made aware in relatively simple terms if their children are to be the ones for whom this document is intended.

Culture

The AFTV is concerned that while the teacher's knowledge of the culture needs to be excellent ("Knowledge of, and engagement with, the systems of culture associated with language provides a basis for understanding the ways in which users of the language establish shared meanings, how they communicate shared ideas and values, and how they understand the world."), the document does not emphasise the fact that teachers will need ongoing in-country experience to do so. This must become an essential component of languages teacher training.

The relationship between language and culture

The section is excellent. The AFTV rejoices in this crucial link between language and culture.

44. This paragraph starts with a statement which is excellent but which excludes other groups.

This document is about all students learning languages in Australia. However, when dealing with Australian Languages, this is not an L2 (a second language), it is truly an L1. Shouldn't it be dealt with separately? or in parallel to the English curriculum?

Paragraphs 45-49 all deal with Australian languages exclusively and the AFTV applauds the ACARA for including these and outlining their value in Australia today and the role they play in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. However worthy these aims and objectives are, their feasibility needs to be questioned.

Understanding the learning of Australian Languages

46. Please clarify what 'ecology' means in the first sentence. Maybe by providing a definition in the text or a glossary.

52. “their (Australian languages) learning by all students”

The AFTV questions the intent of this point. Are Australian languages to be offered to all after community consultation. If yes, is this realistic and would Australian languages become “priority languages” along with the 4 priority Asian languages?

### **The learners, pathways and time on task in learning languages**

The Learners

This section is very good.

Page 22

55. The groupings are and will always be problematic. The way they are described in the current documents is not detailed enough if this is going to be associated with examinations.

“Learners who are first language users of the target language who have undertaken at least primary schooling in the target language...” Does this definition include students who have been immersed in the language at school but do not speak it at home or only speak it with one parent?

“For these reasons, it must be recognised that second language learners will always remain on a different pathway from first language learners with respect to learning the target language” – This is a statement which will have very expensive consequences in schools: some school programs may not run if different classes are needed. Not all schools can cater for a multiplicity of pathways: too much diversity and too many classes to run may mean that teachers are unable to serve an infinite variety of special needs. The practicality of the statements made in this document must be considered carefully.

Pathways

57. There is a risk that insisting on “learning **about** the target language and about the languages in the region” will lead to running cultural classes rather than language classes where this is integrated within the discovery of the language and its sound, structure, idioms etc... We do not think that cultural classes should be run without a central focus on Language. The AFTV is concerned therefore about the use of the word “**about**”

Time on Task

This is one of the most crucial issues, along with the quality of teaching. Unless the time on task is mandated rather than indicated, inequalities will remain as they are.

58. The AFTV believes that the proposed time allocation is too small and that Languages must be compulsory from Foundation to Year 9 (not year 8). Languages study should be undertaken every year in primary school rather than leaving it up to each school to decide on a way to spread the indicative hours.

The figures should be reviewed in order to allow students to achieve a sufficient fluency in the language by the end of their secondary education.

	Current indicative hours	Current Victorian time allocation	AFTV recommended minimal time allocation
F-6	300-400 = 1800-2400 min	150mins or 2.5 hours/week	2.5 hours/week

7-8	130-160		160 – 200 hours
9-10	130-160		200-250 hours
11-12	200-240		250-300 hours

Please note: it is likely that currently running and successful programs will not be altered greatly in the Catholic and independent sector, even if these recommendations are low.

But if funding in State Schools is based on these figures, the state school students will be at a huge disadvantage. They will be unable to achieve the same standard as students in the Catholic and independent sector.

To be fair, this time allocation must be realistic and be in line with the best practice seen in Victoria schools.

The level of the students cannot be lowered. It is what will happen if the “time on task” is so drastically reduced.

### **Curriculum Design for languages**

The aims of learning languages

59. A very good section which explains that learning languages must include  
1)communicating, 2)understanding language, culture and their relationship and 3)self-awareness.

61. Is related to section 59 and explains that “the emphases across these three broad aims may vary at different stages of learning and for different languages”. The AFTV is concerned because it must not be forgotten that the main goal of language education is the production of language for successful communication. Cultural study classes are not to be considered as Language study but rather as Humanities.

The organisation of learning in languages: strands

63. Knowledge

The AFTV is concerned about the subjects matters chosen and hopes they will not be too prescriptive.

64. Skills

Great section

The general public would need further information and examples to respond to this excellent section.

65. Understanding

Excellent.

It could be rephrased to be a bit clearer for non-language specialists.

General capabilities and languages

Great list but it does not mention Numeracy which is an important part of Language learning.

## Cross-curriculum priorities

This section is confusing: are these topics that should be discussed and studied by all students within their Languages classes?

While 72. and 74. will be easy to cover in a French language class, 73. is clearly talking about learning Asian languages.

Would it then mean that all Australian students are going to be encouraged to undertake Australian Languages?

Please clarify what this section is about.

## Key consideration for developing the Australian Curriculum: Languages

75.

With the three pathways, terminology and eligibility are crucial.

The AFTV will not comment on the home users and first-language learners diagrams and pathways as they are a tiny portion of our students. Teachers currently do an excellent job of integrating these students in their classes. However, extra funding to challenge and extend them better should be considered.

78. While these criteria are understandable, it may be important to look at languages whose culture and history interest Australian students rather than trying to impose a language of national importance on them.

Joe Lo Bianco in his keynote at the 2010 Wesley Global Conference explained the failure of Esperanto by the lack of culture in it. He explains that we like languages because of what they carry with them = the way people live, the way people describe history, other extra linguistic factors (economics, politics).

“Success produces motivation” Joe Lo Bianco (2010 Wesley Global Conference)

The AFTV strongly believes that if students are successful in learning a language in their secondary schooling, they are more likely to learn another one later on in life, when needed. The skills they gained while doing that language in high school will allow them to be faster and more efficient adult learners.

On the contrary, when students aren't successful in their secondary education language study, they have a strong sense of “being bad at languages” which is not going to encourage them to learn a language of national importance or any languages further on in life.

79. The AFTV would like to remind the ACARA of the National Statement and Plan for Languages 2005-2012 which states that all languages are equally important.

For that reason we do not believe that languages should be ranked.

-Chinese and Italian are chosen because they “cater for the greatest range of learners”.

This statement is not clear. Please explain what it means. If this does include the provision of many different pathways to serve the multiplicity of language backgrounds, then these two are not necessarily representative of the majority of languages taught in Australian schools.

-Why is Mandarin rather than Cantonese a language included in this list? There are more Cantonese speakers in Australian than Mandarin speakers.

-Why isn't Auslan mentioned in the stages of development? This seems very discriminatory.

-Where are Ancient Greek, Latin and Yiddish? They are languages of culture, studying them helps them understand the linguistics of English, the origins of modern thoughts and philosophy, of politics...

-What is a language of "global importance"? Please provide a definition in the document.

End of document

### **Some general questions and statements.**

-Where is the statement about all students having to learn another language?

-Rather than looking at student retention (for example the fact that only 12% of students do a language in Y12), shouldn't we try to improve the proficiency level of students by the end of Y12/ post Y12?

-Under the Australian constitution, only states and territories can issue a certificate of completion of secondary schools. VCE and IB are the only possible certificates in Victoria. Will there be a Y12 examination and certificate of completion of secondary education associated with this curriculum?

**Other comments:**

**Languages**

The AFTV likes the fact that this document uses the word 'Languages'.

The AFTV has no issue with using the word 'Australian Languages' as long as the elders from these communities agree to it.

**The Teachers**

The AFTV would like to see a section called The Teachers. A lot of emphasis has been put on the Learners and the Languages but very little on the people who will diffuse that knowledge.

The AFTV is particularly concerned about the initial training of teachers and also about the on-going regular and extensive in-country experience required by the type of knowledge and culture we transmit to students.