



**Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers  
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The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training  
Parliament of Australia  
House of Representatives

**Response to the Inquiry into Teacher Education**

This submission addresses Terms of Reference numbers 1 and 7. It argues for the importance of languages and culture education in the preparation of graduates to meet the current and future demands of teaching in Australia's schools.

Globalisation is one of the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This means that education for the future needs, among other things, to ensure that all young people develop skills and capacities that will enable them to understand, empathise, interact and communicate appropriately with people whose language and culture are different from their own. In order to be able to participate effectively in a globalised world, students need to be exposed to an international perspective in education and this means exposure to the languages and cultures, learning to value all languages and cultures and communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Australian school students will not be well served by a monolingual, monocultural approach to education and will not be well served by teachers who have not developed an international, intercultural perspective through their own professional learning.

Linguistic and intercultural skills and experiences are also very important at the national level, as Australian society is made up groups from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Schools and therefore teachers need to be able to effectively engage and support learners from all these backgrounds, understand and build on the particular abilities, language and cultural practices, values and aspirations that they bring with them to the school context and actively promote understanding and ability to engage with this diversity.

Knowledge and understanding of languages and cultures are crucial for the development of such skills and capacities. The importance of languages and cultures learning to the general education of Australian children was recognized by the Hobart Declaration. Over the past fifteen years, a raft of initiatives by the Commonwealth and States has made the learning of languages an integral part of the school curriculum. Most recently,

*National Statement and Plan on Languages Education* has been developed and endorsed by Ministers of Educations from all States. *The National Statement and Plan* affirms the importance of the learning of languages and culture in Australian schools and outlines a vision for expanding and sustaining quality languages education for all students in all schools across the nation. Central to the achievement of this vision is the need to increase the supply of highly qualified teachers available to teach languages.

For these reasons, the criteria for selecting students for teacher training courses (Terms of Reference 1) should facilitate the entry of candidates who have studied one or more languages or have a good level of proficiency because of their background or experiences working/living overseas. Teacher Education courses should be structured in such a way as to ensure that these candidates have the maximum opportunity to further develop their language skills to a high level. Courses should also provide opportunities and incentives for other teacher education students to undertake study of languages. Whether students intend to become teachers of languages and cultures or not, knowledge of other languages and cultures is an important pre-requisite for all teachers who have to prepare students for the multilingual and multicultural demands of new globalised workplaces. Changes in the ways in which people work, increased mobility and international collaboration all mean that professionals in the future will have to be able to adapt their knowledge to new cultural contexts, communicate their knowledge to people with languages and cultures, understand and act sensitively to the values and aspirations of people with languages and cultures, and be able to work in contexts characterized by high levels of diversity. Education for the future must prepare students for such a world.

Term of Reference 7 lists eight areas relating to the preparation of primary and secondary teaching graduates to be examined by the Inquiry. We would strongly argue that the area of languages and culture needs to be added to this list. It is difficult to see how our schools can produce citizens who can operate comfortably and appropriately at a global as well as local level without extended exposure to another language and culture during their schooling. The APPA has argued that one of the most significant problems faced by primary principals is in finding teachers with primary training who can teach, or support the teaching, of languages. At the moment, primary teachers are expected to have the ability to teach across all KLAs except languages and often have little access to or understanding of what students are learning in their language classes. This means that teachers are currently unable to draw on all aspects of their students learning and are unable to articulate their programs with language teaching. This means that, the KLA which most focuses on the emerging communication needs of a globalised society is least able to be articulated into the general curriculum and the overall quality and direction of primary education is undermined by this.

It is not clear whether 'Literacy' in 7 (i) means just literacy in English or is conceptualized more broadly as involving literacy in English, one or more other languages and also the 'cultural' literacy that is developed as part of languages programs offered currently in Australian schools. We would argue that as well as including languages and culture in the seventh terms of reference, the examination of the teaching of literacy should consider literacy in its broadest sense. Contemporary models of

schooling are increasingly focused on developing multiple literacies in order to communicate and access information through different media and using different communicative resources. A monolingual multiliteracy is a contradiction in terms and represents a barrier to communication and participation in a globalised, internationalized world. Studies are beginning to emerge (for example *The Report of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry* in the UK) which indicate that monolingual English speakers are becoming increasingly disadvantaged in a world where knowledge of English is becoming increasingly common. Non-native speakers of English have English in addition to another language and therefore have access to both English language contexts and to other contexts. They therefore have additional skills and are more desirable as employees than English language monolinguals, who have access to only one language and one context. It is important that Australian education prepare future generations of Australian students for success in the future workplace, not for failure and marginalization.

There is much evidence to show that languages and culture programs contribute significantly to the development of students' cognitive, literacy, intercultural and interpersonal skills and capacities. Teacher education programs must ensure that future teachers have the language and cultural skills to maintain and expand these programs in Australian schools. No Inquiry into teacher education can afford to ignore the central place of language and intercultural knowledge in contemporary education and future workplace practice.

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