

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace  
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Additional Estimates 2010-2011**

**Outcome 2 - Schools**

**DEEWR Question No.EW0840\_11**

**Senator Mason provided in writing.**

**Question**

**ACARA GOVERNMENT GOALS OF YEAR 12 STUDENTS BEING FLUENT IN  
ANOTHER LANGUAGE**

How can the Government reach its goal of 12% of students in year 12 being fluent in Mandarin, Korean, Indonesian or Japanese when the maximum time allocated for them to do so is only 860 hours and the time it takes to become fluent in Chinese is 2000 hours?

**Answer**

The draft *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* paper released by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), on 31 January 2011 provides indicative hours for languages teaching as a guide for its curriculum writers to help minimise the risk of overcrowding the curriculum.

The indicative hours outlined in the Shape paper are not an indication of the time required for students to develop proficiency in languages. Languages education research acknowledges that the effort required to achieve proficiency in another language varies considerably between languages. For example, becoming proficient in French is easier and requires less time than becoming proficient in Chinese, particularly for second language learners.

Language education research also recognises that achieving proficiency in any language is also affected by other factors including learner background. Dr Jane Orton in her report, *Chinese Language Education in Australian Schools* (2008) indicates that it takes an adult native English speaker approximately 2,200 hours to become proficient in Chinese. However, first language or heritage speakers will achieve proficiency more quickly. The Chinese language education cohort in Australian schools largely comprises first language (native) and heritage speakers.