

## Modern Languages Teachers Association of Tasmania State Conference

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### **MCEETYA National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools and National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005 – 2008 – and implications for teachers, schools and the community**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- All of us here today are connected through our commitment to the concept of linguistic diversity and the importance of learning languages.
- There are many challenges facing all of us – challenges around language teaching policy and language teaching in practice.
- At national level, the Hobart Declaration of 1989, and the 1999 Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, adopted by State and Commonwealth Ministers of Education, both include Languages as one of the eight key learning areas.
- The Declaration requires that all children in the compulsory years of schooling be helped to attain high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding in Languages, and that outcomes of schooling be free from “*the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability.*”
- Our schools are required to contribute to understanding of “*the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures*” and of “*cultural and linguistic diversity*” so that our students “*posses the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally.*”
- At international level, most of you would be aware of the UNESCO Commission’s Delors Report and its emphasis on a broad, humanistic approach to education based on four pillars (learning to know, to do, to live together and to be). The UNESCO Commission sees the study of languages,

including one's mother tongue, as central to the full development of the human personality. "*Learning is the treasure within*" each individual and culture, a treasure that is accessible through the study of languages.

- For the Commission, the most important task facing our schools for the future is that of "*learning to live together.*" In tackling that task, the teaching of languages plays a pivotal role.
- A language is more than a vital means of communication: mastering a language provides access to core values and beliefs embedded in a given culture.
- There are no doubt few more challenging areas in which to work today than in the field of languages education.
- We have not done nearly enough in this area. At the same time, we must recognise how far Australia as a nation has come in providing a broad range of languages programs in schools – possibly the broadest range in the world.

### **THE LAST 30 YEARS**

- So, how far have we come since I first started teaching in 1975?
- Languages for **all** students is a relatively new concept in the history of Australian schooling. 30 plus years ago, while the study of Languages was an established part of the curriculum in many 'traditional' secondary schools (where I began my teaching career), it was generally seen as an academic and elitist area of study, to be pursued by the more 'academically able'.
- This began to change in the 1980's, when some states, most notably Victoria and South Australia, began to introduce Languages programs at primary levels of schooling, initially in response to multicultural policies.
- The *National Policy on Languages* (LoBianco, 1987) was Australia's first policy on Languages, and was indeed the first of such policies in the world in an English speaking country. It provided a broad educational, social and cultural rationale for the study of Languages. It was instrumental in providing national direction, particularly in promoting the study of a second Language for all students, and in advocating for access to and maintenance of the first Language for students of non-English speaking backgrounds.

- The official recognition of Languages as one of the eight Key Learning Areas in the National Goals of Schooling, referred to earlier, really put Languages on the map and drove subsequent policy development and implementation plans at state level.
- Languages education has since that time been the focus of significant change and growth. A great deal of progress has been made in terms of increased numbers of programs and student participation in Languages. There has been significant funding and attention by governments in the form of various jurisdictional policies, and in the form of various state/territory funding, and national funding arrangements, such as the Priority Languages Element (PLE), the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy and the current School Languages Program (SLP).

### **MCEETYA 2002 - 2005**

- As a result of the National Goals, systems and schools needed to seriously consider the place of Languages and how to deliver on the requirement and expectation that Languages be a key learning area for all students.
- Throughout 2000 and 2001, the AFMLTA actively lobbied for some form of renewed national impetus. In collaboration with the peak principals associations, they drove the decision for a national seminar – the outcomes of which included a recommendation that Australia needed a National Statement and Plan for Languages.
- In 2002, in response to ongoing issues arising out of the challenges for schools and systems in meeting the requirements of the National Goals, and in response to the outcomes of the National Seminar, MCEETYA identified as a priority area the need for a national approach to Languages other than English. They requested a Review of Students Learning of Languages other than English in Australian Schools.
- Some of you will know that in 2003 I conducted this review, on behalf of MCEETYA.
- The Review served two purposes:

- To provide a snapshot of the situation of Languages education in Australian schools in all jurisdictions in all states and territories, as at the end of 2002/beginning of 2003.
- To identify future directions, with a particular focus on areas for national collaboration, in order to improve student learning outcomes in Languages.
- The Review report summarised the range of Languages being taught at the time, provided some statistical information, identified key issues and provided key touchstones which set the direction for the development of the national Statement and Plan.
- The Review found that Across Australia, we had a breadth of Languages offerings in both mainstream and non-mainstream settings. At that time, there were:
  - **146** Languages being taught in Australian government, catholic, independent and ethnic schools
  - **68** Indigenous Languages being taught in Australian government, catholic and independent schools (Indigenous Languages are not currently taught in ethnic schools)
  - **35** non-Indigenous Languages being taught in Australian government, catholic and independent schools
  - **69** Languages being taught in Australian ethnic schools.
- It also found:
  - that the greatest numbers of students were studying Japanese, Italian, Indonesian, French, German, Chinese, in that order
  - and that the key issues included:
    - a need for clearer understanding of what Languages learning actually entails – is it linguistic proficiency or cultural understandings or both?
    - Issues related to teacher supply and teacher availability, in some languages more so than in others.
    - A great deal of professional development on offer, but little evidence of real impact on teacher practice and on student learning outcomes

- Policy goals in place in many systems – with little evidence of strategies in place to genuinely achieve meaningful targets, and little evidence of evaluation systems
  - Student retention – approx 13% of Year 12 students study a Language – this does not compare at all favourably with our overseas counterparts
  - That advocacy and promotion of language learning were needed, as the broader community still did not recognise the benefits that accrue from language learning.
- The Review identified three major recommendations to promote and strengthen the place of Languages education in the curriculum for all Australian students. These recommendations were:
    - That MCEETYA develop a National Statement which describes the purpose and nature of Languages education and which would provide an overarching framework for State, Territory and Commonwealth activities.
    - That MCEETYA develop an initial four-year National Plan for Languages Education, as the basis for a shared commitment to action across the Commonwealth, States and Territories; and which includes six inter-related strands, to address the issues identified in the Review:
      - teaching and learning
      - teacher supply and retention
      - teacher professional learning
      - program development
      - quality assurance
      - advocacy and promotion of Languages learning.
    - That a Working Party be established to progress this work.
  - At its July 2003 meeting, MCEETYA noted these recommendations and endorsed the development of a new National Statement on the purpose and nature of Languages Education, and a National Plan.

- A working party was established to undertake this development. The working party had representation from all jurisdictions across Australia: government educational systems in each state and territory, the Catholic and Independent sectors, the Australian Government, and the Australian Council of Assessment and Curriculum Authorities.
- The Working Party was chaired by SA – by Helen Wildash; with myself as the writer and the executive officer for the group.
- The Statement and the Plan were drafted using the comprehensive data and research that had been undertaken during the MCEETYA Review of Languages the year prior; and incorporated all the recommendations of that Review.
- The Working Party progressed the development by means of wide-ranging consultations with the key stakeholders, including academics, deans of humanities and of education, other MCEETYA taskforces, principals associations, the Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL), the ethnic schools, critical friends and other experts in the field.
- In March 2005 the document was endorsed by the federal and state education ministers and distributed to schools in July. It is now on the MCEETYA website. This is an important document, as it provides evidence of the joint commitment of all Ministers of Education to a vision of quality languages education for all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country.

## **STATEMENT AND PLAN**

The Statement and Plan herald a new opportunity for teachers, schools, sectors and states to recommit to the provision of well planned, supported and resourced language programs for all students in our schools.

It is intended that they will be used as the overarching framework for decision-making in languages education at national level, at state level, at system level, and at the level of the individual school.

They provide a visionary statement that provides direction and raises questions about how to advance the study of languages.

This Statement and Plan are significant because they acknowledge 4 key touchstones:

1. *'All languages are equally valid. Learners gain similar social, cognitive, linguistic and cultural benefits, regardless of the language studied'*
2. Languages are *'for all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country'*
3. The benefits of language learning are clearly described
4. the need for national collaboration – for all of us to work together – no single state or department or sector can do it alone. By way of example, the national collaboration in Languages at the senior secondary level, through the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages (CCAFL), is testimony to the great things that can be achieved through national collaboration.

## **THE STATEMENT**

The Statement provides a description of the nature and purpose of language learning and its place within the broader curriculum. It is designed to provide a conceptual basis and reference point for curriculum decision-making in educational sectors and schools and for related developments at local, state and national levels.

The 3 sections of the Statement address:

- Purpose and nature of languages education
- National developments
- Implications for jurisdictions and schools

Each of these sections begins with a commitment declaration or underpinning principle that acts as a focal point for the statements that follow.

### Section 1: Purpose and nature of languages education

- The purpose and nature of languages education (ps 2 – 3) describes the current context in languages education, both locally and globally; why language learning is important within this context; and how it contributes to the education of learners. This section may be useful

when needing to promote languages in schools, eg at parent information meetings etc

- The introductory declaration is as follows:

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

- The benefits of language learning both for the individual and society are clearly articulated :

*‘Language learning:*

*enriches our learners intellectually, educationally and culturally*

*enables our learners to communicate across cultures*

*contributes to social cohesiveness through better communication and understanding*

*further develops the existing linguistic and cultural resources in our community*

*contributes to our strategic, economic and international development*

*enhances employment and career prospects for the individual.’*

These clearly articulated benefits of languages education help address one of the lingering difficulties that we in Australia have, in understanding the value of second language learning and embracing it wholeheartedly.

- The focus on p3 on intercultural language learning is a particular strength of the Statement, in my view, as this will further support this shift in thinking about language learning.

- The Statement acknowledges that:

*‘Education in a global community brings with it an increasing need to focus on developing intercultural understanding. This involves the integration of language, culture and learning’.*

This is no doubt the most powerful part of the National Statement – the framing up of language learning as intercultural language learning. This is what distinguishes the document from previous policy statements and takes it into the future.

*‘Intercultural language learning helps learners to know and understand the world around them, and to understand commonality and difference, global connections and patterns. Learners will view the world, not from a single perspective of their own first language and culture, but from the multiple perspectives gained through the study of second and subsequent languages and cultures. For learners who study their background or heritage language, it provides a strengthened sense of identity.*

*Intercultural language learning contributes to the overall education of learners, developing in them the capabilities to:*

- *communicate, interact and negotiate within and across languages and cultures*
- *understand their own and others’ languages, thus extending their range of literacy skills, including skills in English literacy*
- *understand themselves and others, and to understand and use diverse ways of knowing, being and doing*
- *further develop their cognitive skills, through thinking critically and analytically, solving problems, and making connections in their learning.*

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

## 2. Section Two: National Developments

- National developments (ps 4 – 5), outlines the historical context here in Australia; the recognition of Languages in the National Goals - both Hobart (1989) and Adelaide (1999); statistical information related to numbers of languages and students; and the key challenges.

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

### 3. Section Three: Implications

- Implications for jurisdictions and schools (ps 6 – 7), presents a set of principles related to quality and provision, that systems and schools should take into account.
- The introductory declaration here is as follows:  
*“In order to realise the vision of quality languages education for all students, in all schools, in all parts of the country, jurisdictions and schools need to take into account matters relating to quality and provision.”*
- This is the section that may be of most relevance, eg, it provides advice as to the factors that need to be considered in the choice of languages, guidelines for enhancing language learning and improving classroom conditions. This section also highlights the role of alternative providers such as ethnic schools, Schools of Languages, and distance providers, in recognition of the fact that individual schools cannot provide the entire range of languages that students may wish to study.

In relation to **Quality**, what are the implications for schools?

- The Statement identifies the fundamental relationship between teachers, the curriculum, and the teaching environment.
  - Firstly, it identifies the need for appropriately qualified and trained teachers:  
*‘Quality programs depend on quality teachers’.*  
 Teachers need to be:

*‘well-trained and have opportunities to participate in ongoing professional learning, which focuses on the development of their linguistic, cultural and pedagogical proficiencies.’*

*‘Quality teachers need supportive program conditions and a professional working environment’.*

- Secondly, the Statement identifies that continuity in languages learning within schools, and from primary to secondary levels, is important, given the cumulative nature of language learning.

*‘Learning languages is a cumulative process. The development of deep understanding and language proficiency requires extensive engagement over a prolonged period of time. This means that sustained effort is essential, with frequent and regular lessons, appropriate time allocations, and with schools working together to improve continuity across the levels of schooling.’*

- Thirdly, it recognizes the need for whole school commitment to languages education.

*‘Effective languages programs require whole school support, particularly from school leaders’.*

Language study as one of the Key learning areas is an *‘integral part of the mainstream curriculum.’*

- Remember, these statements have been agreed to at the highest levels, and it is up to us, as classroom practitioners, as members of our professional associations, as members of our systems, to utilize them and exploit them to their fullest, when we are faced with untenable situations, such as the primary school teacher who is teaching 600 students for one 45 minute lesson a week across 3 locations.

In relation to **Provision**, the Statement recognises that as a nation, we need to continue to support a diversity of Languages offerings in our schools, to respect individual schools decisions regarding Languages to be taught within a national framework; and to strengthen the provision of our Indigenous Languages.

So what are the implications for schools and systems? The Statement firstly identifies the issue of choice of languages.

Which language should a school offer? The Statement acknowledges that all languages are equally valid. However local contexts will influence decisions as to which language is to be taught. In making these choices, the Statement reminds us of the unique place that Australian Indigenous Languages have, and of the role of complementary providers such as Schools of Languages, distance education, and ethnic schools.

The role of the ethnic schools sector is pivotal in the promotion and teaching of Languages that are used in the wider Australian community, particularly in smaller candidature Languages. This role needs to be strengthened, as the mainstream education sectors cannot offer the diversity of Languages available through the ethnic schools sector. Through Commonwealth and state funds to ethnic schools (with foreign government support in some cases), numerous students are given access to a wide range of Languages not otherwise available. In strengthening their role as complementary providers, attention is being paid to quality assurance processes through a current national project.

## **THE NATIONAL PLAN**

**The Plan** specifically aims to:

- establish long-term directions for languages education
- advance the implementation of high quality and sustainable programs
- provide flexibility in implementation by individual jurisdictions.

The Plan focuses on six nationally agreed inter-dependent strategic areas, which address the key challenges and areas for action that were identified in the 2003 MCEETYA Review.

The six strands are :

1. teaching and learning, which aims to strengthen what is happening in the classroom – it has a strong curriculum focus
2. teacher supply and retention, which aims to increase the numbers of teachers of languages, and enhance teacher preparation courses
3. professional learning, which recognises the importance of supporting teachers through ongoing and sustained professional development

4. program development, which aims to ensure that programs are in place to cater for the many and diverse needs of our student population
5. quality assurance, which focuses on monitoring and evaluation, at all levels – school, state, national
6. advocacy and promotion of languages, to try to strengthen community attitudes and understandings about the value and benefits of learning languages.

These 6 strands provide a framework within which jurisdictions are now operating and are being accountable.

Each strand has an objective, underpinning principle and series of actions.

For example in the Teaching and learning strand, the objective is:

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

The Underpinning principle is:

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

The actions are to:

*‘Develop strategies to increase participation in languages learning in the compulsory and non-compulsory years of schooling.’ etc*

Each of the six strands is set out in this way.

Further more under the Plan, through national agreement with all jurisdictions the evaluation process will include the collection and analysis of student participation data and national sample assessment. The details of exactly what data will be collected, how this will occur, and the timelines, are currently being discussed by the working Party.

## **GAINS MADE DURING DEVELOPMENT**

During the development of the Statement and Plan, in my personal view, a number of gains were made.

### **Intercultural language learning**

- The move towards describing language learning as intercultural language learning was a significant gain. The work of Tony Liddicoat, Angela Scarino, Michelle Kohler and Leo Papademetre in their research and publication, funded by the Australian Government in 2003, *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*, was particularly informative and useful. If you are not yet familiar with their report, please download it from the DEST website – it is a very hands on document which provides clear and accessible support in thinking through the classroom implications for pedagogy and assessment.

### **Teacher and classroom conditions**

- During development, there was much debate and discussion around the untenable conditions in which language learning occurs at times, and in which some teachers of Languages are required to work.
- Some groups (eg the principals associations and the AFMLTA) would have liked the document to issue specific rulings on what should and should not occur (eg stipulations for minimum time allocations as just one example; compulsory languages as another example).
- As these matters related to jurisdictional decisions in some cases; and in some cases to decision-making in individual schools, we were unable to reach national agreement; and, in some cases, it was felt that it was inappropriate to do so.
- What we did agree on, however, was that at the very least, the Statement should provide guidelines, and these guidelines are explicitly stated on p. 6 and 7.

### **KEY STRENGTHS**

I believe the document has four key strengths:

1. It affirms that all languages are equally valid, and provides advice to jurisdictions as to the factors that need to be considered in the choice of languages
2. The focus on intercultural language learning, is already driving that agenda forward. It is the focus of a number of national professional development

projects, and it is being focused on more and more by individual jurisdictions in their professional development programs and as they review and redevelop their Curriculum frameworks and/or language policies. Ultimately, for teachers this will mean a different way of doing their work. In approving the Statement and Plan, eg, the ACT CE, in his endorsement of the document, said:

*‘we are impressed with the focus on intercultural understandings as a futures orientation to the teaching of Languages. This work is timely in the current educational arena.’*

The WA CE said:

*‘the National Statement is valuable for its lucid exposition of the goal of intercultural language acquisition by all Australian students, as indispensable to their participation in the modern global environment.’*

3. The guidelines provided in the Statement can be used at both system and school level to enhance language learning and improve classroom conditions. The flexibility for individual jurisdictions to implement the Plan in ways that best suit their particular contexts. The WA CE said:  
*‘A major merit of the Plan is the flexibility with which it addresses the aspirations of national languages learning goals, while allowing each jurisdiction to respond in terms of its local characteristics and priorities.’*
4. The six strands of activity within which jurisdictions need to operate and be accountable for. These strands were specifically identified as the way to move forward at national level to address the identified issues.

## **FUNDING**

- During the development of the Statement and Plan, one of the challenges for the Working Party to grapple with was to develop a Plan which had no dedicated funding attached to it.
- We knew from the outset that there would not be additional funding from the Commonwealth, and that individual jurisdictions, given their financial constraints, were not in a position to contribute to a national pool.

- So the Plan had no funds of its own. It was developed with the intention that it would serve as a guide to inform individual jurisdictions decision-making on how they would spend their Federal and State funds.
- All jurisdictions had to agree that their funding would be used for priorities identified in the Plan – not on other initiatives.
- Concurrently while the Statement and Plan were being developed, the Australian Government was developing its new funding arrangements for the next quadrennium (2005 – 2008).
- The intentions of the Statement and the Plan, and the Australian Government’s directions, were able to be dovetailed so that they would be mutually supportive.
- The changes to funding and accountability arrangements brought in by the Australian Government gave the Plan teeth. They require jurisdictions to report on the actual amounts that are allocated to ethnic schools and to indigenous languages; and they also require jurisdictions to report on how they are progressing initiatives identified in the Plan.
- The Australian Government provides approx \$24 mill per annum to support Languages education nationally.
- From 2005 the Australian Government is reserving 5% of this amount for national projects, in line with the recommendations outlined in the Plan. This amounts to approx \$1.2 mill per annum; and should result in some worthwhile projects being undertaken. The remainder of these programme funds is distributed to State and Territory education authorities to assist languages education as they see fit.
- This level of funding support is second only to Literacy and Numeracy in terms of Australian Government support for any specific curriculum area.
- In addition the Australian Government makes funds available for teacher professional learning through the Australian Government Quality Teacher programme. The QTP has just finished its first quadrennium and during this phase \$1.2 mill was provided for the ALPLP. Further funds are being directed towards languages in the current quadrennium, with approx \$2 mil for a significant project to progress the work on intercultural language learning. This work is being undertaken by Angela Scarino and Tony Liddicoat at the University of South Australia.
- Further funding is being provided through another section of DEST for the Endeavour Language Teaching Fellowships.

## **WORKING PARTY**

- In late 2005, the MCEETYA Languages Education Working Party was established. Membership is comprised of representatives of educational jurisdictions with direct reporting responsibilities to Ministers of Education, including the NCEC and ISCA. The Working Party is chaired by Terry Woolley, Executive Director, Department of Education and Children's Services S.A.
- The Working Party is responsible for implementing and monitoring the National Statement and Plan for Languages. Its two key roles are:
  - to reach agreement on processes and structures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the National Plan
  - to provide advice to DEST on projects of national significance, from those identified in the National Plan.
- The Working Party plans to hold face-to-face meetings at least two times each year, with tele-conferences in between. The Working Party has now met on four occasions.
- The Working Party recognises the importance of ongoing partnerships with all the relevant stakeholders, and the need to nurture and strengthen the goodwill and collaboration that were established in the development of the Review Report and the Statement and Plan.
- The Working Party is committed to ensuring that communication channels and consultation mechanisms are in place. To this end, a communication strategy has been developed. Communication channels include updates to all stakeholders a few times a year, and a web page which is currently being developed by MCEETYA, which will be a source of up to date information.

## **NATIONAL PROJECTS**

- In late 2005, DEST approved 8 significant national projects, as recommended by the Working Party, to be funded through the Australian Government's Schools Languages Program (SLP) from 2005 funds (approx \$1.2m). These projects, some of which have commenced, are being monitored by the Working Party. Most of these projects will conclude in 2007:

- *Project 1: National coordination and quality assurance of ethnic schools.* This project, being conducted by Community Languages Australia, is well underway, with regular and comprehensive reports provided to the Working Party.
  - *Project 2: Enhancing the quality of Indigenous languages programmes through improved training and support for speakers of Australian Indigenous languages working in Australian schools.* The successful tenderer for this project is the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
  - *Project 3: Investigation into the state and nature of languages education in Australian schools, including the policy drivers and inhibitors that help or hinder the effective delivery of languages programmes.* The successful tenderer for this project is the University of South Australia – with Angela Scarino and Tony Liddicoat as Project Directors.
  - *Project 4: Development of a nationally co-ordinated promotion strategy.* The Request for Tender is yet to be developed.
  - *Project 5: Review of teacher education for languages teachers.* The successful tenderer for this project is the ACER.
  - *Project 6: Development of a Guide to the Teaching, Learning and Assessing of Languages in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.* The Request for Tender is yet to be developed.
  - *Project 7: ‘Leading Languages’ – a professional learning program for school principals and leaders.* The Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC) is being contracted to undertake this project, and has already met with AFMLTA members for input.
  - *Project 8 – National Seminar on Languages Education for Key Stakeholders.* The Asia Education Foundation (AEF) is being contracted to organise this event, which will be held on the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006. The AFMLTA will be invited to participate, and we will provide a report on the outcomes.
- The Working Party has made recommendations for project priorities to be developed through 2006 funds, and is awaiting Ministerial endorsement before any announcements can be made.
  - These projects, and others yet to be identified, and to be implemented over the next 3 years, will have a positive and far-reaching impact on languages education in all states and territories and across all educational sectors.

- Complementing these national projects will be a national professional learning programme funded through the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme, as mentioned earlier. The main aim of this project will be to develop languages teachers' knowledge and understanding of intercultural language teaching and learning, with a particular focus on long-term planning and programming, including the assessment and reporting of student outcomes.
  
- As a general approach, an Advisory Group will guide the development of each of the projects. These Advisory Groups may include representatives from:
  - A state or territory government jurisdiction who is a member of the Working Party
  - A non-government jurisdiction
  - the Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teachers Associations (AFMLTA)
  - the peak Principals Associations
  - DEST
  - the national parent bodies
  - the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE)
  - the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH).

Decisions about specific membership of each Project Advisory Group will be guided by this general approach, and by the specific nature of the project.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

- The last national data collection in Languages was undertaken by MCEETYA in 2002, when data was collected for 2000, 2001 and 2002.
- The Plan states, on p.11, that its effectiveness will be measured through:
  - *'The collection and analysis of student participation data*
  - *And the development of national sample assessment processes to determine the quality of student learning outcomes'.*

The Working Party is currently discussing options for the collection and analysis of student participation data, student achievement data, and teacher data, as part of the

evaluation process. This is a very complex area, and one where careful consideration is required, in recognition of differences across jurisdictions. Discussions will continue, and information on this will be provided at a later stage.

## CONCLUSION

- In conclusion, I would like to reflect on why this MCEETYA decision should be seen as a landmark decision.
- MCEETYA is the Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. So, what role do they have, when the responsibility for education is basically a state responsibility?
- Maurice Wenn, the MCEETYA secretary, in a recent article in *Education Quarterly*, described MCEETYA's responsibility as:

*'...the framework within which ...schools exist. That 'national framework' is collaborative and cooperative, and as such, can sometimes seem to be cumbersome, unresponsive or even ineffective...But for all its limitations, this federal structure has a significant strength – where Ministers do reach agreement, it is a national agreement shared, owned and implemented by all Australian jurisdictions. So, over time, there have been many national decisions taken and agreements made that have directly and indirectly affected the work of schools. Starting with the national goals themselves, what is taught, who teaches it, how learning is measured, how it is reported, to whom it is reported and with what resources have all been strongly influenced by agreements between Ministers in the MCEETYA forum.'*

Jillian Dellit, in a recent article entitled 'the National Treasure of a national agenda for schooling' in the same publication, made the following observation:

*'For decades now, when they use the term 'national', Education Ministers in Australia and their departments have meant 'agreed by all Australian state, territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers'. National things are the things that hold us together – every community, student, parent and teacher – that provide a benchmark for all Australians; that articulate common educational values, standards, aspirations and expectations for the future. The 'national' also frames our education for the rest of the world to see.'*

Jillian goes on to observe:

*‘The achievements of national programs, national agreements and a continuous national agenda in education are far from trivial. These achievements have been hard-won and carefully nurtured by decades of far-sighted statesmen and women – both public servants and elected representatives – without or sometimes in spite of, the spin and hype of announcements and controversy. They have persisted in the understated belief that the most important legacy a policy maker can leave may lie in these matters, and that the legacy itself is more important than recognition for persistence...*

*In education, our national agenda, however flawed, proclaims: ‘Here Australia stands as this point in time; this is our direction and intention...*

*Some remarkable collaborations and agreements have resulted, building a consistent, high-quality, increasingly interoperable schooling system, shaped by nine governments. It is recognisable anywhere in the world as Australian.’*

And so, I conclude by emphasising again the importance of this document that has been endorsed by all 9 Ministers – this is the first time ever that this has been achieved in Languages in Australia - a remarkable feat to get agreement from all Ministers. And at the international level, we are one of the few nations in the world to have a national position on Languages – one agreed to by all States and Territories. This document is already having a significant impact on activities at both state and national levels, and it is up to us to ensure that it has the sort of impact that we, as languages educators, would want it to have.

Remember, the Ministers have signed off on:

1. All students in all parts of the country
2. All languages are equally valid
3. the implications for schools in relation to quality and provision.

In Jillian’s words: here we stand, at this point in time. This is our direction, and this is our intent.

## **References**

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