

Note: The sections in the Paper which are headed “What this tells us” will be the basis for the Panel’s recommendations.

Where questions are broken into life stages (early years, school years and adult years), you can provide responses to any or all life stages.

Please indicate clearly at the beginning of any responses you wish to remain confidential.

Unless indicated as confidential, responses will be treated as public information and published on our website. Please see the [Public Submissions Policy](#) for further information.

Name: Kelsey Cooper, State President and Anita Wood, Immediate Past President

Organisation: Modern Language Teachers Association of Tasmania Inc (MLTAT)

Question One: Are there any key themes we have not identified to improve literacy across:

The Early Years (0-4 years-old)

The MLTAT recognises the importance of improving English literacy outcomes in Tasmania. We are concerned that the paper is monolingual in nature, and has minimal recommendations for bilingual learners and their families.

On page 43, the paper states that there are key themes to support migrant and refugee families. It is reassuring that support has been considered in different languages. However, it is also important to have some of this information available verbally in different languages.

We cannot assume that a child is not already well on the way in their literacy journey / meeting literacy milestones purely because they do not respond in English. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) states that many learners have varied language backgrounds *“Children’s use of their home languages underpins their sense of identity and their conceptual development. Children’s sense of belonging is strengthened when their language, interaction styles and ways of communicating are valued. They have the right to be continuing users of their home language, as well as to develop competency in Standard Australian English (page 57).”*

As Educators, the EYLF reminds us that *“Relationships are strengthened when educators recognise and affirm children’s home languages and cultural identities and when they create culturally secure and safe places for children and their families” (p.9)*

It is also important to note that in bilingual education, sometimes learners experience a ‘dip’ in linguistic ability when they learn multiple languages side-by-side. In most cases, this will even out. Some research and recognition of this dip would be useful for educators. At present, the Paper states that we need more ways of identifying children who are at risk of not meeting developmental literacy milestones (page 16). It needs to be acknowledged that this may be beneficial for native English speakers, but may not be for non-natives.

Learning any language is an asset and support to developing English literacy learning. The MLTAT suggests that this paper also addresses the benefits of multilingualism in Tasmania. Where the term “literacy” is used in this paper, it strongly suggests the term is a substitute for “English.”

The School Years (5-17 years-old)

The MLTAT again expresses concern that the key themes listed for primary years neglect to mention that some learners will come from a multilingual background and will arrive to their English speaking classroom at various stages of their childhood and English language development. We also stress that learning an additional language supports literacy learning. This is explicitly stated in Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum:

“Languages develop students’ ability to listen to, read, view, create, and perform a range of spoken, written and multimodal texts in the target language. It provides opportunities for students to move **between the target language and English** to analyse, interpret and reflect on texts. Students enhance and extend their knowledge and understanding of English literacy, and use their knowledge of English literacy to support their learning in the target language. They develop increasing fluency in the second or additional language. They also develop the ability to reflect on and discuss their understanding of language as a system, using the metalanguage of English.

Learning an additional language(s) and English is mutually beneficial to literacy development. This is reflected in the links between language learning and the National Literacy Learning Progression (NLLP) in Languages. Content is linked to the expected level of literacy development that students, typically, would have achieved at each year/band of years. For example, students in Year 8 are likely to be operating at Level 6 in the Speaking sub-element of the NLLP. These students may not be operating at Level 6 Speaking in a second or additional language(s). However, the teacher can make connections and draw on students’ English literacy skills to support their learning of the second or additional language(s).

Learning an additional language is not mandated in Tasmania. However, many states in Australia now have mandates and targets for Languages learning. Learning a language supports literacy development and English language skills. Therefore by not having a mandate or policy in Tasmania, our learners are further disadvantaged. A recent article that quotes Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers, academic and committee member Anne-Marie Morgan states that Australian learners are being disadvantaged academically:

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/new-south-wales-education/best-in-class-experts-call-for-mandatory-language-learning-to-boost-aussie-kids-academics/news-story/61adb5a3d7ca06192f65acc61f85701d>

A recent report commissioned by our colleagues the Modern Language Teachers Association of Victoria and Dr Ruth Fielding recently found that bilingual stream students perform to the same level as non-bilingual stream students, but many show significantly higher results in literacy achievement.

<https://mltav.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Bilingual-Programs-enhance-literacy-skills.pdf>

As Mairin Hennerbry-Leung from the University of Tasmania comments in *The Conversation*, “Collaboration between schools, local universities, professional associations and state government plays a key role” in the educational gains our students are afforded. <https://theconversation.com/is-your-kid-studying-a-second-language-at-school-how-much-they-learn-will-depend-on-where-you-live-155219>

An investment in learning additional languages is also an investment in literacy outcomes.

The Adult Years (18+ years-old)

All points written previously apply to this age-group as well. We would also stress that the 'literacy tick' given by TASC does not apply to Languages courses except English. This disadvantages our learners from migrant refugee backgrounds who might be proficient in another language, or who are learning a language in addition to English. Not providing a literacy tick for TASC Languages courses perpetuates a monolingual mindset and tells our migrant community that their language skills are not as valid as English, which is just not the case. No language is more worthwhile to study than another.

Question Two: What are the three main things we should prioritise doing in:

The Early Years (0-4 years-old)

- In-class support
- Acknowledgment that curriculum learning areas outside of English support literacy development.
- More acknowledgement of bilingual education and support for families who are multilingual as well as support for educators working with bilingual families

The School Years (5-17 years-old)

- Support for languages policy and education in Tasmania
 - o Students want to study a language but cannot, "To boost senior secondary language enrolments, languages need to be available and encouraged all the way from early learning to year 10 in order to build a pipeline of language students for senior year levels.... "Additionally, each state needs a language policy that requires schools to teach the recommended hours so students see a commitment to this subject area. The minimum recommended hours by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority are 870 across Years 6-12. As this is a recommendation, these hours are not enforced and differ between states." <https://theconversation.com/3-barriers-that-stop-students-choosing-to-learn-a-language-in-high-school-178033?fbclid=IwAR2kJ1rP6gN9m6vRHmMjjMgQ3p4iYF2dbP0K7DilRW2pNEhZHNXBMgrk5c4> Developing a policy in this area would assist with the Paper's conclusion that we need a systematic approach to literacy education which cascades to the whole school (page 27).
- Research the benefits of learning an additional language as a means to support literacy
 - o Stakeholders' poor understanding about how to support Languages teachers in supporting students with diverse learning needs and from diverse backgrounds is perpetuated by a lack of ongoing state-based professional development opportunities and initial teaching education programs inadequately developing knowledge and skills needed to construct inclusive Languages environments (Nijakowska, Tsagari & Spanoudis, *English as a foreign language teacher training needs and perceived preparedness to include dyslexic learners*, 2018; Scrimgeour, & Morgan, *Contributing to the professional learning for Languages educators: 22nd International Languages Conference*, 2019). These issues stem from a gap in contextually relevant research.

- Offering extra ATAR points at tertiary level for Languages study has been disbanded. The MLTAT suggests bringing this incentive back to the table.

The Adult Years (18+ years-old)

One way to improve literacy as an adult, is to learn another language. Adult Education classes have been disbanded by previous governments and are no longer supported by local University courses.

We need to promote the financial incentives of studying a language.

- “Recent decisions have made it much cheaper to study languages at university, but this message hasn’t been promoted by the Morrison government that enacted it. Hardly anyone knows.” https://www.smh.com.au/national/study-languages-and-save-uni-fees-discount-lost-in-translation-20220120-p59q0e.html?fbclid=IwAR3dIcHZdxtBu2GPYHStFr3HwNuaE_R0TUJfGIMOVsidpq0wfS7Wx84fX30

To reignite local adult face-to-face courses, we need to offer incentives at tertiary level study and promote the benefits of Language learning in the community.

- Ensuring the longevity of adult language courses means investing in the young people who will one day be the adults. As mentioned above in the “School Years” category, we need to create a ‘pipeline’ of a community who embraces and understands the many intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of Languages study. This would also assist with increasing the demand for local face-to-face University level courses. The University of Tasmania has ceased to provide face-to-face Languages courses and only offers distance education through mainland university programs.
- Learning a language improves cognitive function. Promoting this to older adults would assist with increasing their literacy levels and keeping their minds active.

We need to have the courses there for students to be able to study.

- Lack of language options impacts enrollment. Awareness of the transitional skills acquired from language learning is important for maintaining enrollments in courses. As University of Tasmania lecturers Mairin Hennerby-Leung, Andy Bown, and Megan Short state:

“If you take the same language in the senior years as you have all through school, you will obviously benefit from already knowing a lot of the language as well as its grammatical structure... But you could also take the opportunity to learn a different language, which will be easier to grasp now that you’ve already studied one... You could transfer your knowledge of how the French grammatical system works to another language.” https://theconversation.com/thinking-of-taking-a-language-in-year-11-and-12-heres-what-you-need-to-know-164080?fbclid=IwAR3ej4XG_bXyLWB_lEtxtC6kaUYCR2rEFPk8IOWq1RrbvkdwDXw6WzKEE

Question Three: Are there any data sets not considered in this paper that should be used to monitor literacy achievement in:

The Early Years (0-4 years-old)

- Tasmania should start documenting which schools are studying a language and if this shows any gains in literacy over a period of time. As stated previously, students studying bilingual programs will often experience a 'dip' in their literacy progression in primary school education before seeing sharp gains.

The School Years (5-17 years-old)

- Tasmania should start documenting which schools are studying a language and if this shows any gains in literacy.
- Data sets that should not be considered in this paper are PAT and NAPLAN tests and other standardised tests like this. These tests are designed for native English speakers and do not take into consideration a student's literacy ability beyond the English language. These tests are demoralising for students who speak English as an additional language which can have a detrimental impact on their engagement in class. This in turn negatively impacts furthering their literacy and other abilities.

The Adult Years (18+ years-old)

- The MLTAT and researchers from the University of Tasmania are about to launch a wide community study into Languages Attitudes. This survey will go 'live' into the community in coming months. The survey will be Tasmania's largest collection of community data regarding attitudes to languages. It will be interesting to see if there is a correlation between negative attitudes to languages and literacy results in schools

Question Four: If you are a provider of a service, what kinds of guidance would you hope to see in the Community-wide Framework?

Question Five: Are there any other comments you would like to make?

On page 18, the consultation paper writes that:

Educators should have professional learning on structured literacy and other strategies which will assist them to make adjustments for learners. Structured literacy approaches emphasize highly explicit and systematic teaching of all important components of literacy. These components include both foundational skills (e.g., decoding, spelling) and higher-level literacy skills (e.g., reading comprehension, written expression).

This neglects to consider students from multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. Educators should also have professional leaning on the challenges faced by students who speak English as an Additional Language or Dialect. For example, they need to be aware of the cognitive load on students who speak a language that is not English at home. The paper writes that immersion in the spoken language at home and parental involvement in the language greatly benefits the child's attentiveness in the classroom. However, the paper neglects to acknowledge that a lack of understanding in the classroom of that child's background or even that child's language can greatly diminish attentiveness and self-esteem. A key theme of the paper is "the learner at the centre." However the learner that is portrayed in the paper is a monolingual native speaker. In an increasingly globalised world, this is just not the case in our classroom contexts.

MLTAT agrees with the statements on page 16. The consultation paper mentions a need to further support the literacy workforce (teachers, educators, tutors). The MLTAT supports the suggestion to provide provision of more staff specialising in language and literacy. Here, the MLTAT reiterates the need for a Languages education policy in Tasmania. A Languages policy would ensure language educators are teaching language and literacy to our young people in a culturally-aware environment. Literacy across all languages should be celebrated and championed. The MLTAT would like to acknowledge the inclusive and literacy-focused "Literacy Matters Literacy Strategy 2017-2027" in Western Australia

"Literacy Matters endeavours to adopt a culturally responsive teaching model when considering the linguistic, cultural and social contexts of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). By understanding the 'lived experiences and needs of EAL/D speakers in a culturally responsive manner we hope to encourage literacy in each unique linguistic, cultural and social context in Western Australia." (Page 5)

In addition, Languages are a good extension for learners who are verbally gifted. Learning a language gives the verbally gifted learner the opportunity to build upon their literacy skills by adding new language patterns, word order, scripts/alphabet, pronunciation and intercultural communication.

Languages educators in Tasmanian schools work tirelessly to embed literacy teaching and learning into their programs. We are disappointed that the contributions that we can make to literacy education are often devalued by lack of policy and understanding of what we do.

Intercultural understanding and foreign languages must be encouraged as "a capability in English only is no longer sufficient" in an increasingly globalized world (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2016, p. 5). Tasmanians are already geographically isolated. Removing students from some of the few opportunities they have to engage with cultures beyond their own promotes monolingualism, further disadvantages holistic development and negatively impacts personal and social capability and intercultural understanding. Communication and understanding ourselves as communicators are main foreign language aims (ACARA, 2016).