



# **The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages**



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# Introduction

1. The *Australian Curriculum: Languages* will be designed to enable all students to engage in learning a language in addition to English.
2. The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* has been designed to guide the development of languages curriculum by ACARA. It is anticipated that the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* will also be used to guide languages curriculum development by other organisations and that it will be the basis for recognition of such curriculum by ACARA.
3. This paper presents a rationale for learning languages and describes key concepts and understandings that inform languages education. It describes learners of languages, the pathways for learning, and a structure for organising curriculum content and achievement standards. It includes a description of general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities and a set of key considerations for developing the Australian Curriculum: Languages.
4. Acknowledging and building on what has gone before, ACARA considers that the curriculum development proposed in this paper will make a difference to languages learning in Australia because it:
  - recognises that languages learning is for all students in Australian schools who bring their individual linguistic and cultural profile to their learning, whether this is English or the target language or various combinations of languages
  - articulates a clear commitment to and positioning of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages
  - proposes a structure and organisation of the curriculum that addresses the complexity of languages learning in relation to the two key variables: learner background in the target language and time on task (hours of study)
  - expects a substantial time allocation
  - recognises that the curriculum should be language specific
  - defines the curriculum in relation to language-specific achievement standards, which focus on the active and proficient use of the language being studied.
5. It is recognised that, in addition to a quality curriculum, provision of high-quality

language learning in Australia also requires attention to other matters. These include:

- clarity in policy expectations, with a need to consider the priority given to language learning and the options that exist to improve the provision of language programs
- the provision of qualified teachers supported by high-quality teaching resources, including digital resources, to enhance face-to-face teaching.
- professional development of existing teachers to implement new concepts in the curriculum
- management of the diversity of learners in schools as well as the continuity of language learning across primary and secondary schools.
- incentives for learning languages at senior secondary level
- ‘eligibility requirements’ for entry into languages courses at senior secondary level.

6. ACARA will work with relevant authorities and organisations to develop strategies to aid the provision of high-quality language learning for all young Australians.

## Background: History, challenge and an opportunity

7. The development of the *Australian Curriculum: Languages* provides an opportunity to ensure that all students benefit from learning languages. Australia has a strong history of national collaboration in languages education. This curriculum development involves a network of contributors including teachers, parents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other language communities, jurisdictions, professional language associations, language teacher educators, linguists, and researchers. Their expertise and experience are essential to meet the challenge of productive innovation that will strengthen curriculum design, teaching, learning, and assessment in languages education.
8. The development of the *Australian Curriculum: Languages* necessarily builds on past experience — on the history of languages policy and developments in languages-in-education in this country. This history includes many voices and perspectives and some particular challenges. In his review of languages and Australian schooling, Lo Bianco (2009, p. 25) comments on the diversity of interests that have shaped debates about languages policy and languages education. Language professionals have argued for improved learning of second languages and for investment in research and in public services dealing with languages. Immigrant groups have sought support for the intergenerational maintenance of home languages as well as English as a Second Language (ESL) provision. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups have advocated for language recognition, for the rights of land claims based on language continuity, for the documentation of languages, for language revival initiatives for languages at risk of extinction, and for the value of bilingual programs. Diplomatic, business, and trade circles have recognised the importance of a capability in languages and multilingualism in economics, diplomacy, trade, cultural exchange, and national security.
9. The active engagement by these different groups reflects the broad range of interests that the Australian community has in languages and also the range of meanings that learning languages holds for particular individuals and groups. Languages education policy and languages planning have had to respond to these different interests and meanings. Meshed with these different interests and meanings are the particular interests of those who make policy for education in general. The principle of access to languages education for all students in Australian schools has been established in all

three Declarations of the National Goals for School Education (MCEECDYA 1989; MCEETYA 1999, 2008). Languages are included as one of the key learning areas in the Australian Curriculum, a core component of the educational experience of all students.

10. Perspectives on the place languages should occupy in the curriculum vary. For some, the value of learning another language is self-evident. For others, languages have never been part of their personal or social experience and they may not see their relevance. There has thus been extensive debate about provision for learning languages. Key themes, some of which relate to curriculum development and some to policy and implementation, include:
  - which languages should be taught and why
  - language ownership
  - whether to limit or sustain the diversity of languages taught in schools
  - how to recognise the language learning experience of different groups of students such as first language, second language, and background language learners
  - how to provide continuous, appropriately sequenced, and educationally challenging pathways through the curriculum so students make worthwhile gains in language learning
  - how to manage transition in learning and articulation between different phases of schooling
  - how to manage resources to ensure the provision of qualified teachers of languages as well as quality teaching and appropriate learning materials
  - how to provide appropriate time allocations for language learning at both primary and secondary levels within a ‘crowded curriculum’
  - how to work with universities to ensure appropriate transition in language learning, to support initial and ongoing teacher education, to collaborate on research, and to promote and reward language learning
  - how to work productively with complementary providers such as state government schools of languages and ethnic and community schools
  - how to maximise the role of technology in enhancing provision
  - how to encourage more students to study languages at senior secondary levels in order to increase Australia’s overall languages capability.
11. These ongoing discussions have been captured repeatedly in state and national review reports (e.g. de Kretser & Spence-Brown 2010; Kohler & Mahnken 2010; Lo Bianco

2009; Liddicoat, Scarino, Curnow, Kohler, Scrimgeour and Morgan 2007; Orton 2008; Seong-Chul Shin 2010) and in state and national initiatives. In recent years a substantial amount of research and development has been undertaken, primarily in the context of *The National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools: National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005–2008* (MCEETYA 2005), and with the implementation of the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) 2008–2012.

12. Yet in spite of this ongoing policy discussion and research and development work, provision of languages in schools in Australia and uptake by students remain fragile at all phases of schooling. Experience to date shows that for languages programs to work well, certain conditions are necessary:
  - recognition by the school and the wider community of the value of languages
  - appropriately qualified teachers who are supported by ongoing professional learning that is linked to current and best research
  - appropriately sequenced curriculum and assessment guidance and support
  - adequate teaching and learning resources
  - appropriate time allocation: language learning requires significant time, regularity, and continuity.



## A rationale for learning languages

*All students should experience well designed and supported language programs, taught by well trained and supported language teachers, in schools that actively support language teaching linked to universities that are fully committed to widespread and successful language study. It is worth re-iterating why this ambition is important. The principal reason is to do with the deepest purposes of education itself, to instil knowledge, to deepen understanding, to stimulate reflection and to foster skills. Languages are intimately linked to the essentially humanistic, cultural and intellectual reasons for making education compulsory. Bilingualism can foster more reflective and imaginative dispositions in citizens, and the principles of democratic discourse, participation and opportunity which Australia proclaims also find resonance with language study since the bulk of humanity lives in societies and continues traditions forged outside of English. (Lo Bianco 2009, p. 64)*

13. The major rationale for learning languages is that being able to communicate proficiently gives learners essential communication skills in the target language, an intercultural capability, and an understanding of the role of language and culture in human communication. It provides the opportunity for students to engage with the linguistic and cultural diversity of humanity, to reflect on their understanding of human experience in all aspects of social life, and on their own participation and ways of being in the world.
14. Learning languages broadens students' horizons to include the personal, social, and employment opportunities that an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world presents. The interdependence of countries means that people in all spheres of life have to be able to negotiate experiences and meanings across languages and cultures. It has also brought the realisation that, despite its status as a world language, a capability only in English is not sufficient, and a bilingual or plurilingual capability is the norm in most parts of the world.
15. Learning languages:
  - extends the ability to communicate and extends literacy repertoires
  - strengthens understanding of the nature of language, of culture, and of the processes of communication
  - develops intercultural capability; develops understanding of, and respect for, diversity and difference, and an openness to different perspectives and experiences
  - develops understanding of how values and culture shape world view and extends

the learner's understanding of themselves, their own heritage, values, culture, and identity.

- strengthens intellectual and analytical capability and enhances creative and critical thinking.

16. Learning languages also contributes to strengthening the community's social, economic, and international development capabilities. Language capability contributes to the development of rich linguistic and cultural resources through which the community can engage socially, culturally, and economically in all domains, including business, trade, science, law, education, tourism, diplomacy, international relations, health, and the arts.
17. Learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages meets the needs and rights of young people to learn their own languages and recognises their significance in the language ecology of Australia. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, learning their own language is crucial to their overall learning and achievements. It enables them to achieve a secure acceptance of their own identity and helps them to develop a wider recognition and understanding of their language, culture, land, and Country. This contributes to their well-being. For all students, learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages provides a distinctive means of understanding the Country in which they live, including the relationship between land, the environment, and people. The ongoing and necessary reclamation and revitalisation of these languages also contribute to reconciliation.

*When I was growing up, I saw other kids speaking their language, like Italian or Greek. It made me crave for my own language. I always felt that part of my life was missing ... The language thing is a real positive thing for all of us. Not just for the children but for the grown-ups too. We need to know where we come from and where we are going. We go through life trying to fill that need. Language seems to give me that little bit of place, fulfilment and pleasure. (Nelson 'Snooky' Varcoe, a Nunga man from Point Pearce, SA, quoted in SSABSA 1996b, p. 32)*

## Languages as a learning area in the Australian Curriculum

18. The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* paper provides direction for the curriculum development of all languages. At the same time, it recognises that students learn specific languages. Each language has its own distinctive structure, systems, conventions for use, and related culture(s); its place in both the Australian and international communities; and its own history in Australian education. The *Australian Curriculum: Languages* will include the development of language-specific curricula and a framework for Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages.
19. The development of the *Australian Curriculum: Languages* contributes to the general education of all students. It operates from the fundamental principle that for all students, learning to communicate in two or more languages is a rich, challenging experience of engaging with and participating in the linguistic and cultural diversity of our interconnected world.
20. Language-specific curricula will be developed in ways that recognise features that languages share (through the use of common terms, key concepts, ways of elaborating curriculum content, and achievement standards, as described in this paper), and also the distinctiveness of particular languages (reflected and described through language-specific curriculum content and achievement standards).
21. The *Australian Curriculum: Languages* will provide for the many young people learning a new language at school — a language that is additional to their first language (used before they start school) and/or the language they use at home.
22. Making languages a key learning area in the Australian Curriculum also recognises Australia's distinctive and dynamic migration history. A quarter of all Australians were born overseas. They have brought with them, and many continue to use, their own languages and cultural practices. These language communities are a valued part of Australia's diverse economic, linguistic, social, cultural, and religious landscape. Importantly, Australia's geographical position and geopolitical history have required and continue to require serious engagement with the languages and cultures of the Asian region.
23. The *Australian Curriculum: Languages* will give students opportunities to maintain and

develop their own language as an integral part of their linguistic and cultural repertoires, ensuring a stronger sense of identity in the context of diversity. The curriculum will provide for those with background in the language (those who may use the target language at home and have knowledge of the target language to varying degrees) and for those for whom the target language is their first language.

24. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages*

The *Australian Curriculum: Languages* recognises the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as the languages of the first peoples of Australia. This recognition includes and values the learning of these languages, as they are the languages of this country and the cultural heritage and property of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Australia. It is an acknowledged right of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to learn their own languages within the framework of the Australian Curriculum (*United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007*, adopted by General Assembly Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007). As the languages are unique to Australia, they are therefore part of the heritage of all Australians. The opportunity to learn Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages is important for all students in Australian schools because they represent a core element of the culture and history of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Through studying these languages, students also learn about the history, culture, land, and environment of the country in which they live.

*... language is an integral part of our identity, and ... language is the expression of our unique relationship with the land and the cultural practices that have been handed on down the generations for thousands and thousands of years.*

*However, for many of us who have lived in situations where our language has deliberately been denied to us for many decades because government policies and practices have prevented it, this part of our identity has been withheld from us ...*

*in spite of all this, our languages have been passed on, and have never been forgotten by those groups who weren't taught to speak them in the full way. Many words from them are used within our English speech, and these words are markers of our identity and distinctiveness as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Jeanie Bell, community linguist in SSABSA 1996b, p. 25)*

25. *Classical languages*

The study of classical languages provides learners with a key to the literature, history,

thought, and culture of the ancient world. A unique feature of the study of classical languages is the opportunity to engage closely with cultures and societies that are removed in time and place from our own, and is a bridge between the contemporary world and the civilisations of antiquity.

26. *Auslan*

Auslan is the visual–gestural language of an Australian linguistic minority group, the Australian deaf community. It is a unique Australian language characterised by its own grammar and lexicon. Increased learning of Auslan by deaf and hearing students facilitates communication between deaf and hearing communities, and helps to maintain and share the cultural and linguistic heritage of deaf and hearing Australians.

# Language, culture and learning

*When children learn language, they are not simply engaging in one kind of learning among many: rather, they are learning the foundation of learning itself. The distinctive characteristic of human learning is that it is a process of making meaning – a semiotic process; and the prototypical form of human semiotic is language...*

*Whatever the culture they are born into, in learning to speak children are learning a semiotic that has been evolving for at least ten thousand generations. (Halliday 1993, p. 94)*

27. Curriculum design in languages education needs to give consideration to language, culture, and learning, and understanding the relationship between them. This relationship defines language learning as an intercultural process, focused on interpreting and creating meaning.

## Language

28. Language is a rich and complex human capability that makes it possible to:
- communicate for a variety of purposes with diverse people in diverse social and cultural contexts
  - mediate action and different ways of doing things to make connections between experiences, to make things happen
  - represent and shape knowledge, ideas, and experiences, to think, imagine, create, interpret, make sense of the world, and learn
  - analyse and evaluate, to interpret, analyse, and reflect on ideas, opinions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences; to understand that languages are grounded in particular places, landscapes, and territories; times and memories; and social classes and groups
  - develop and shape values and attitudes
  - enact, develop, and understand the nature of identity and to develop self-awareness in relation to others.
29. Language is systematic. It comprises complex systems of signs and rules that enable

people to interpret and construct the meanings needed to communicate with each other. These systems (phonological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic) have to be internalised. They work alongside other conventions such as gestures, facial expressions, dress conventions, and behaviour protocols. Communication through language relies on people having a shared understanding of the conventions for using these signs.

30. Language is variable. Consciously or unconsciously, users make choices about their use of language in different domains and contexts. People use different forms of language, styles, linguistic features, and dialects for different purposes, and they ascribe values to particular words and meanings and ways of using languages. People make specific choices to pass on knowledge appropriate to cultural practices and social domains.
31. Language is dynamic. Languages adapt and change across time, space, and social and cultural contact. They are influenced by interaction within groups and between groups across different historical, political, social, and economic times and contexts. Languages have been significantly impacted, for example, by the media and digital communications. Technologies have changed and continue to change language and literacy practices and languages themselves.
32. Language is a cognitive activity. It is a uniquely human capability for processing information and experience. It lies at the core of conceptual development and learning. It is through language that meaning is interpreted and created.
33. Language is a social and cultural practice. It is the primary means by which people construct, share, and maintain understanding and meaning as they interact. It is the means through which people make sense of experience and engage in the reciprocal processes of interpreting and creating meaning. It involves thinking about the:
  - relationships between languages
  - processes of learning languages
  - power of language (e.g. to include or exclude, to persuade, to argue, to entertain, to praise, to criticise)
  - relationship between language, culture, learning, and identity
  - recognition of language as a social and cultural practice that acknowledges the relationship between language and culture. Culture shapes the interpretation and making of meaning through language, just as language, in turn, shapes culture.

*Language is open, dynamic, energetic, constantly evolving and personal. It has no fixed boundaries, but is rather made of hybrids and endless varieties resulting from language being creative, expressive, interactive, contact-and-dialogue-based, debated, mediated, negotiated. (Shohamy 2006)*

## Culture

34. Culture involves complex systems of concepts, values, norms, beliefs, and practices that are shared, created, and contested by people who make up a cultural group, and are passed on from generation to generation. Cultural systems include variable ways of seeing, interpreting, and understanding the world. They are constructed and transmitted by members of the group through the processes of socialisation and representation. Language has a major role in these processes. Knowledge of, and engagement with, the systems of culture associated with language provide a basis for understanding and representing the ways in which users of the language establish shared meanings, how they communicate shared ideas and values, and how they understand the world. This knowledge and engagement are fundamental to successful communication.
35. Like language, culture is dynamic. It changes because people's contexts change, for example, as a result of migration, which brings one culture in contact with another. In communicating across cultures, people have to move between their own culture and the cultural world of others.

## Learning

36. In language learning language is both the subject matter and the medium for learning new substantive knowledge.
37. Learning additional languages has traditionally been seen as a process of acquisition that occurs in the mind of the individual learner. More recently, learning additional languages is understood not only as a mental phenomenon, but also as a social, interactive, and collaborative one. Sfar (1998) has characterised these two ways of understanding learning, as the 'acquisition' and the 'participation' metaphors, noting that both are required in learning.
38. In learning to use the target language, learners learn to:



- exchange meanings reciprocally through interaction with people and/or texts
- ‘move between’ and come to understand the linguistic and cultural systems of the language they are learning, and at the same time referencing these to their own linguistic and cultural systems
- develop metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness of what it means to interpret and to act in the world, and to be interpreted reciprocally by others.

## Language learning and knowledge or content

39. In addition to being a means through which people engage in social communication, language is a means through which knowledge (or content) is constructed, developed, represented, negotiated, stored, contested, discussed, communicated, taught, and learnt in interaction with other creators and users of knowledge.
40. The knowledge (or content) that is the core of languages curriculum involves various dimensions:
  - the language itself, as a linguistic system
  - cultural knowledge (culture specific and culture general)
  - general knowledge (i.e. broader knowledge of the world), including knowledge drawn from other areas of the curriculum.

## Language learning as an intercultural process

Aoki, a Japanese/Canadian educator explains:

*Bilingualism ... is indeed a mode of being-and-becoming-in the world. For me personally, learning a second language has been an entering into the strange world of unfamiliarity.*

*Gradually, the new language sheds its unfamiliarity as I see more deeply into another perspective of the world and see with my new eyes an already familiar world. Two perspectives dance before me and press forward upon me, and when I find difficulty with one perspective, the other lends a willing hand.*

*Being bilingual ... is to meet the unfamiliar second language at the margin of the horizon of the mother language. It is to belong to two worlds at once and yet not belong to either completely. It offers an opportunity to fall back on the only person I must depend on, myself. Being bilingual asks of me that I live while probing life and life experiences. Because I live in tension at the margin, questioning becomes central to my way of life. (Aoki 2005, p. 243)*

41. Students come to the language learning process with various preconceptions, assumptions, and orientations that are shaped by their existing language(s) and

culture(s). Learning a language challenges these existing positions.

42. For all students, learning a language (whether as a second language or as the students' home or heritage language) involves working with, and moving between, at least two languages and cultures: the new and the existing. This movement between languages and cultures is integral to language learning and use; it is what makes the experience intercultural.
43. Learning languages involves comparison and reflection. Through comparison, things previously taken for granted are noticed. Students are encouraged to explore and recognise their own linguistic, social, and cultural practices and identities as well as those associated with speakers of the target language. Through this process of experience, interaction, and reflection they can begin to see the complexity, variability, and sometimes the contradictions involved in using language. Learning and using the new language do not require the learner to forsake a first language. Rather, the process expands and broadens the learner's communicative repertoire, bringing additional resources from which to draw when making meaning.

*Intercultural language learning involves developing with learners an understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture. It is a dialogue that allows for reaching a common ground for negotiation to take place, and where variable points of view are recognised, mediated, and accepted.*

*Learners engaged in intercultural language learning develop a reflective stance towards language and culture, both specifically as instances of first, second, and additional languages and cultures, and generally as understandings of the variable ways in which language and culture exist in the world. (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler 2003)*

44. Through experience in communicating, learners come to realise that each person brings to an interaction knowledge, understanding, and values that have developed through experience over time and articulated through their distinctive language(s) and culture(s). They realise that success in communication with others is not only determined by what they themselves do, but is also affected by what members of the other different language and culture understand them to do. In this sense they engage with interpreting and understanding interaction and communication, and engage actively in interpreting self (intraculturality) and others (interculturality).

### **Language learning and literacy development**

45. Learning languages develops overall literacy. It is in this sense 'value added',

strengthening literacy-related capabilities that are transferable across languages (e.g. the language being learnt and the learner's first language), across domains of use (e.g. the academic domain and the domains of home language use), and across learning areas.

46. Literacy development involves conscious attention and focused learning. It involves skills and knowledge that need guidance, time, and support to develop. These skills include the ability to decode and encode from sound to written systems; the mastering of grammatical, orthographic, and textual conventions; and the development of semantic, pragmatic, and critical literacy skills.
47. Literacy development in a second language is cognitively demanding. It involves these same elements but often without the powerful support of a surrounding oral culture and context. The strangeness of the additional language requires scaffolding. In the language classroom, analysis is prioritised alongside experience. Explicit, explanatory, and exploratory talk around language and literacy is a core element. Learners are supported to develop their own meta-awareness, to be able to think and talk about how the language works and about how they learn to use it. Similarly, for first language learners, literacy development that extends to additional domains and contexts of use requires comparative analysis that extends literacy development in their first language and English.
48. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognise the importance of literacy to their children. They support literacy education programs that are founded on establishing literacy in their children's first languages, that is, the Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages that their community use. Literacy in English is regarded as concomitant on first establishing students' literacy in their first languages. Although most bilingual programs in Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages are designed to help students' transition into learning in English, their fundamental value is in the development of bilingual literacy. Bilingual programs in Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages have been successful in maintaining the use of these languages in schools and in creating generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are literate in their languages. Strengthening the bilingual literacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is essential to improving their overall academic achievement and success.

## **Learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages**

*The recently developed policy Indigenous Languages – A National Approach sets the context for the learning of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages. Its objectives are as follows:*

- a. National Attention: To bring national attention to Indigenous languages – the oldest surviving languages in the world; and the pressures they face.*
- b. Critically Endangered Languages: Reinforce use of critically endangered Indigenous languages that are being only partly spoken to help prevent decline in use and to maintain or extend their common, everyday use as much as possible.*
- c. Working with Languages to Close the Gap: In areas where Indigenous languages are being spoken fully and passed on, making sure that government recognises and works with these languages in its agenda to Close the Gap.*
- d. Strengthening Pride in Identity and Culture: To restore the use of rarely spoken or unspoken Indigenous languages to the extent that the current language environment allows.*
- e. Supporting Indigenous Language Programs in Schools: To support and maintain the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages in Australian schools.*

(Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts 2009)

49. For Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages the interconnection between language, culture, identity, and Country, plays a vital role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community life. Non-Indigenous students should understand this connection as part of the reconciliation process.
50. The present ecology of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages is the product of a diverse and complex set of circumstances, including colonisation by people from other language traditions. The inclusion of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages in the curriculum has a wider purpose beyond learning particular languages. These languages have a fractured history and to study them requires students to develop the skills both of language learning and of undertaking linguistic work. Learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages requires knowledge of language maintenance and development and, in many cases, language reclamation. Giving students an opportunity to develop the skills of doing linguistic work (e.g. collecting, describing, and recording language) while learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages will also increase their understanding of the nature of all languages.
51. Within the rich diversity of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages, the learning of each particular language will differ, depending on the view of its community, as owners or custodians of the language, about who is permitted to learn it and teach it, in what kinds of programs, and under what conditions. Ownership of

those languages must be recognised and respected. To this end, schools must follow protocols and consult their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and, in particular the Elders, in negotiation and decision-making about the teaching and learning of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages.

52. Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages have always been, and continue to be, maintained through oral communication. School programs have assisted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop Western-style literacy in their languages but, in the process, have committed them to a range of changes that writing systems impose on languages. This kind of literacy may ignore the range of visual literacy and arts performance practices that have supported Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages. Schools generally place Australian dance, visual art, environmental studies, music, and general cultural studies in other areas of the curriculum such as Indigenous Studies, Studies of Society, Arts, Music, and Environmental Studies. These studies naturally support Aboriginal language and Torres Strait Islander languages programs, integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning, using visual and audio support in communicating.

*Aboriginal language[s]... [are] a treasure trove of Australia's cultural knowledge waiting to be discovered and recorded. The development of language materials through using the latest technology was a real favourite with my language students. Creating their own stories that relate to their lifestyles opened up students to a new world of communication. Students never before had shown such an interest in learning and line ups at the scanner were common; the use of the school camera and video camera also became very popular; developing stories and animation on PowerPoint proved to be a successful tool in building up confidence to use these technologies in their other subject areas. Students also found that the English language became a lot easier to work with.*

(Aretha Briggs, a Yorta Yorta woman and an Aboriginal Languages educator, personal communication 2010)

## Language learners

*...what learners – with their minds and bodies, home and peer cultures and languages, previous learning experiences, interests and values – bring to their learning environments and how that shapes their interactions with those learning environments.  
... all of the questions about meaning, experience, language, culture, positioning, and so on, need to be asked about the interactions between particular learners and their learning environments as they evolve over time. (Haertel, Moss, Pullin & Gee 2008, p. 8)*

53. Understanding who learners are, both as language learners and as young people, is important as a basis for developing their languages learning.
54. An increasingly varied range of students are learning languages in Australia in contemporary times. The changing pattern of migration to Australia is extending the range of languages that students bring with them to school and for which the education system seeks to provide in some way. This means that, in many languages classrooms, there are students with varying degrees of experience of and proficiency in the target language. A range of languages, other than the target language, with which students have affiliations are also present.
55. In this context, learners come to learning languages with diverse linguistic, cultural, and personal profiles. They come with distinctive biographies: their individual histories, their geographies, their previous experiences of and relationships with the target language, and their particular motivations, expectations, and aspirations. All of these influence how, what, when, and why they learn, and, at least to some extent, their success in learning. As unique, social, and cultural beings, students interpret the world and make sense of their experiences through their own social and cultural traditions, understanding, and values.

56. Decisions about grouping learners and their language learning are complex. For the purposes of developing a curriculum that is sensitive to the varying degrees of capability in different languages and to diverse needs, learners of languages in Australia can be identified in three major groups:
- second language learners
  - background language learners
  - first language learners.
57. **Second language learners** are those who are introduced to learning the target language at school as an additional, new language for them. The first language used before they start school and/or the language they use at home is not the target language.
58. **Background language learners** are those who may use the target language at home (not necessarily exclusively) and have knowledge of the target language to varying degrees (e.g. vocabulary, phonological accuracy, fluency, and readiness to use the language) and have a base for literacy development in that language.
59. **First language learners** are users of the target language who have undertaken at least primary schooling in the target language. They have had their primary socialisation as well as initial literacy development in that language and they use the target language at home. It also relates to students learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages and includes learners whose primary socialisation is in the target language and who may or may not have yet developed initial literacy.
60. Within each of these groups there are differences in proficiency in using the target language. It is acknowledged that the span of language experiences of background learners is particularly wide, and that learners in this group are likely to have quite diverse affiliations with the target language. Nevertheless, for pragmatic reasons, it is not feasible to identify more groupings than these. For all learners of languages in Australia, the different relationship between their learning of the target language and English must be acknowledged. In addition it must be recognised that second language learners will always be on a different learning pathway from first language learners when learning the target language.

# Design of the Australian Curriculum: Languages

61. The Australian Curriculum: Languages draws upon the key concepts in language learning described in Section 5. The curriculum will be designed to achieve three interrelated aims that are realised through three interrelated strands. Content descriptions will detail the skills, knowledge, and understanding that students are to develop. Achievement standards, based on assumptions about time on task in learning the target language, will describe what students are expected to achieve and how well.

## The aims of learning languages

62. The interrelated aims of learning languages are to:
- communicate in the target language
  - understand language, culture, and learning and their relationship, and thereby develop an intercultural capability in communication
  - understand oneself as a communicator.
63. Students learn to communicate in the target language for a variety of purposes with people in diverse social and cultural contexts in ways that are personally and culturally appropriate and meaningful. Through the use of the target language students expand their communicative repertoire. For second language learners, this means learning to communicate in a language in addition to their own. For first language learners, this means learning to communicate in additional domains of language use and to move between their first language (or languages) and English. For learners with some home background in the language being learnt (which may range from a receptive through to a productive capability), this means strengthening their existing use and knowledge of the target language.
64. Through learning to communicate in the target language, learners also develop an understanding of the relationship between language and culture in intercultural exchange. In this way learners come to understand ways of perceiving experience that may be different from their own. This helps to develop respect for multiple perspectives on the social, cultural, and linguistic nature of human action and identity, and understanding the diverse, rich, and dynamic nature of the contemporary world.



65. By stepping outside the known space of their own language and culture and entering a new communicative and cultural space, the learner is afforded opportunities for noticing, comparing, analysing, and reflecting on this experience and on themselves. Through reflecting on their own and others' communication, learners come to better understand the reciprocal roles as performer and audience in another language and culture with other speaker(s) or texts. They learn that different ideas and ways can be regarded as 'normal' to others, while being 'new' or 'foreign' to them. This experience invariably challenges and ideally extends their ways of seeing and representing the world. They learn to question their existing ideas and practices in relation to those of others. This kind of reflection is what enables movement between different systems of meaning-making and contributes to the development of metacognitive capability.
66. These three interrelated aims are realised through the experiences of communication, interaction, and learning, and through analysis and reflection on the nature of interpretation and meaning-making in the context of experiences. The focus on experience and experiential learning in the curriculum is intended to capture the real-life processes of action or interaction, analysis, and reflection that are integral to human experience, communication, and learning.
67. In developing the curriculum, the emphases across these three broad aims may vary for different languages, for different pathways in learning, and for different stages of learning across the F–12 continuum.

## Organising the learning of languages: strands

68. Learning in the Australian Curriculum: Languages is organised through three strands that are realised interactively in curriculum design. The three strands are:
  - **Communicating:** using language for communicative purposes in interpreting, creating, and exchanging meaning
  - **Understanding:** analysing language and culture as a resource for interpreting and creating meaning
  - **Reciprocating<sup>1</sup>:** reflecting upon and interpreting self in relation to others in communication as language users and language learners (self-awareness as user and learner).

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<sup>1</sup> The ACARA Board, at its October 2011 meeting, accepted the intention of the reciprocating strand. However, before agreeing to the three-strand structure outlined in this paper, the Board asked how this strand would be realised in draft curriculum. Initial work on the Chinese and Italian curricula will provide such evidence for the ACARA Board to consider in early 2012.

69. In developing the curriculum, these three strands should not be seen as discrete, but rather as different facets of using and learning language and reflecting upon these processes. The relative contribution of each strand will differ for different languages, for different pathways, and for different stages of learning.

70. **Communicating**

The communicating strand focuses on students learning to use the target language to interpret, create, and exchange meaning and to use the language to communicate in different contexts. It involves learning to use the target language for a variety of purposes. These include to:

- socialise to exchange ideas, opinions, experiences, thoughts, feelings, and plans in interaction with others (spoken and written) and to take action as participants in interaction with others
- obtain, process, interpret, and convey information in a range of spoken, written, and multimodal texts; to develop and apply knowledge, thus developing varied forms of expression in the target language
- respond and give expression to real and imaginative experience through literature and other forms of aesthetic expression and textual modalities
- mediate between languages and cultures to develop the capacity to be open to different perspectives
- construct and give expression to their own identity as individuals and as members of particular speech communities and cultures.

71. The communicating strand involves various combinations of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills:

- interacting and interpreting meaning (spoken and written reception)
- interacting and creating meaning (spoken and written production) and incorporates diverse text types and task types.

72. **Understanding**

The understanding strand focuses on students developing knowledge and understanding of the many dimensions of languages, cultures, and learning. It involves analysing language use in context and developing an understanding of:

- the systems and characteristics (systematicity) of the target language and culture (grammatical, textual, functional, sociolinguistic, cultural and intercultural knowledge) and its dynamic nature
- the variability of language use — how language use changes with the context of situation and the context of culture (participants and their relationship,

- circumstances of communication)
- intercultural exchange — ways in which meaning is established and exchanged within and across languages and cultures
- the ecology of languages, their regional status, use, and well-being, for example, understanding language reclamation and maintenance in relation to Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages
- how diverse technologies, media, and literate practices shape communication
- the power of language (e.g. to include or exclude, to persuade, to argue, to entertain, to praise, to criticise, to shape identity)
- the processes of learning languages
- the relationship between language, culture, and identity.

### 73. **Reciprocating**

The reciprocating strand focuses on students reflecting on and interpreting self in relation to others in communication and in learning. Through reflection, students develop metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness of themselves as intercultural communicators and develop self-awareness of who they are in relation to others. This involves:

- observing, interpreting, and describing linguistic and cultural practices
- comparing, questioning assumptions, reinterpreting, reconsidering, and referencing linguistic and cultural systems of the target language to their own language; questioning their existing ideas and practices in relation to those of others
- re-examining self in relation to others, and others in relation to self (intracultural and intercultural)
- adjusting their own perspective or position relative to others and carrying this understanding forward to subsequent experiences
- developing metacognitive awareness of how language and cultural conditions shape identity.

74. Reciprocating involves coming to understand both the nature and processes of communication and the learner's role as intercultural language user and language learner. In reciprocating, the learner is an analyser as well as being a performer and audience in communication with others. These reciprocal processes can impact on meaning-making and identity formation.

## Structuring the Australian Curriculum: Languages

## Learner pathways

75. Learner background is a major variable that shapes the structure of the curriculum and decisions about the curriculum content and achievement standards in learning languages.
76. In developing the Australian Curriculum: Languages, pathways for second language learners, background language learners, and first language learners will be developed as appropriate to cater for the particular groups learning each specific language. That is, only pathways for groups that are relevant to the particular language will be developed.
77. The recognition of pathways in the development of the curriculum does not necessarily represent or determine the administrative organisation of language programs in particular schools. School authorities and schools will make decisions about the latter. Nevertheless, the availability through the Australian Curriculum: Languages of curricula for pathways that are the most relevant for each particular language will ensure that teachers have a point of reference for considering the language development of learners.

## Program types

78. Learning languages may occur through different types of programs: language-as-a-subject programs, content-based programs, and various types of bilingual programs. At the time of developing the Australian Curriculum: Languages, the major form of provision in languages education is through the language-as-a-subject program type, therefore this is the program type that will provide the baseline for language-specific curriculum development.
79. For Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages, programs should be implemented that do justice to the current state of each particular language and to encourage their revival and maintenance. There is a range of program types for the teaching of these languages in schools. Building on the Australian Indigenous Languages Framework (SSABSA 1996a), these include:
  - second language learning
  - first language maintenance and development
  - language revival (including language revitalisation, language renewal, and language reclamation)
  - languages ecology (learning about the target language, learning about the languages

in the region, and learning about Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages).

### Time on task

80. Another major variable that shapes the curriculum content and achievement standards in learning languages is time on task (hours of study). The Australian Curriculum: Languages is being developed on the assumption that all students will learn languages across the Foundation to Year 8 span, and that the curriculum will provide for continuing learning through to the senior secondary years. It will describe learning content and achievement standards based on an indicative number of hours of study for primary, junior to middle, and senior secondary phases of schooling.
81. These indicative hours represent an assumption about time on task made only for the purposes of curriculum development. The provision of indicative hours is not designed to establish time allocations for teaching and learning in schools. Schools and school authorities will make policy decisions regarding time when implementing the curriculum.
82. Curriculum writers will use the following indicative allocation of hours as the basis of the development of curriculum content and achievement standards:
  - 350 hours of learning undertaken across Foundation to Year 6 (the equivalent of 5% of the total teaching time per year)
  - 160 hours of learning undertaken across Years 7 and 8 (the equivalent of 8% of the total teaching time per year)
  - a further 160 hours of learning undertaken across Years 9 and 10 (the equivalent of 8% of the total teaching time per year)
  - a further 200 to 240 hours of learning (undertaken across Years 11 and 12).
83. These allocations also assume language-as-subject programs. Schools and jurisdictions will allocate a larger number of hours in implementing content-based and bilingual programs. Decisions about the continued study of languages into Years 9 and 10 will be taken by school authorities, the school, or the student.

# Describing the Australian Curriculum: Languages

## Curriculum Content

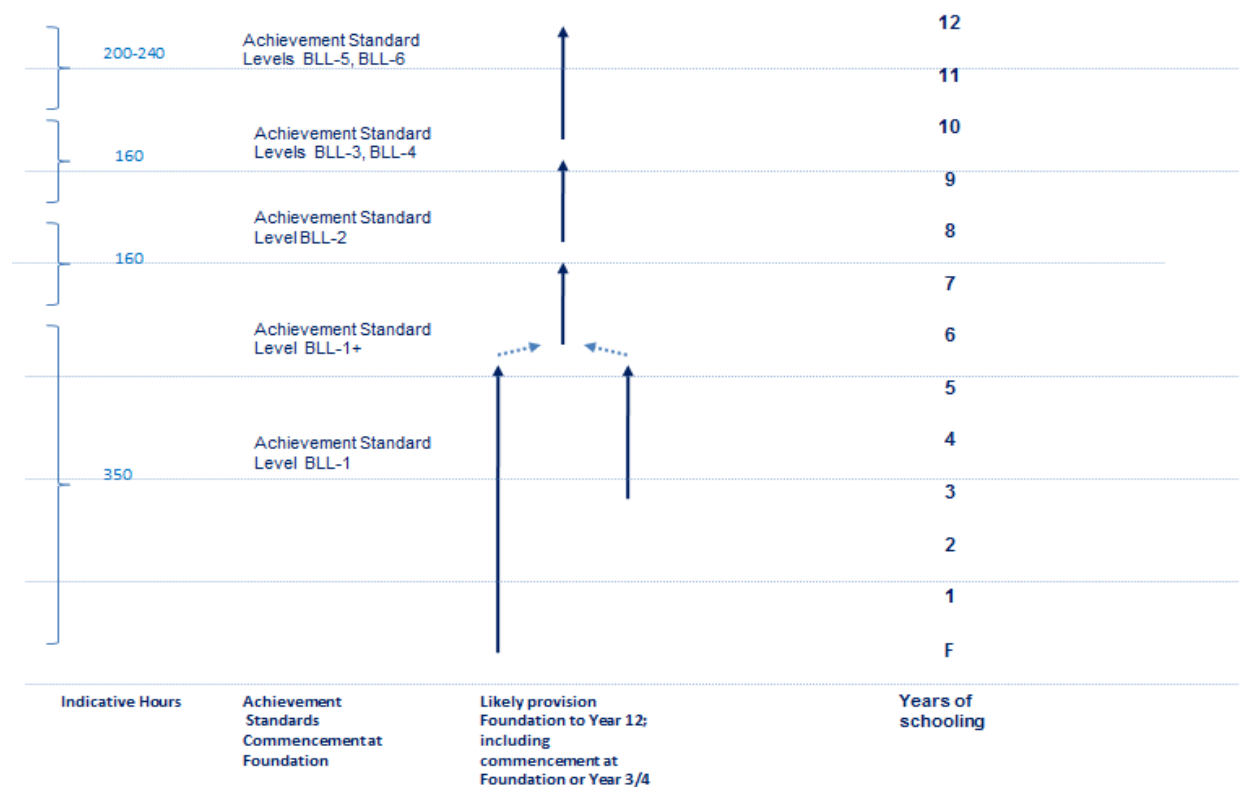
- 84. The curriculum content will identify what teachers are expected to teach and what students are expected to learn. It will be language specific. The curriculum content sequences will vary according to the pathway being developed.
- 85. The curriculum content will be organised by strands and in sequences linked to the achievement standards.

## Achievement standards

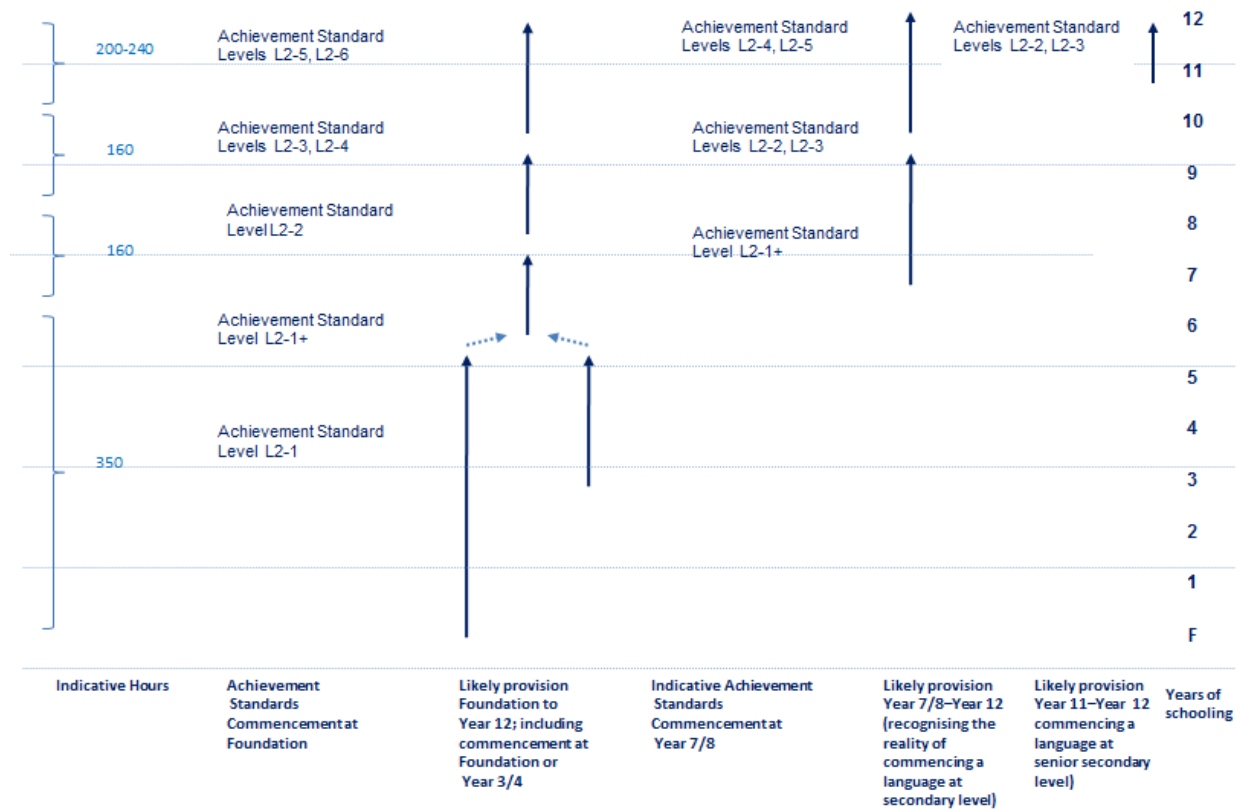
- 86. The Australian Curriculum: Languages is designed to enable students to achieve designated achievement standards in the active use of the target language. The achievement standards will be language specific and pathway specific.
- 87. The language-specific achievement standards will describe what all students can achieve in the indicative times that guide the writing of the curriculum.
- 88. The relationship of indicative hours of study and the curriculum content and achievement standards that describe the Australian Curriculum is shown in the following diagrams, which recognise the diverse pathways. The student cohort in each language may or may not include the range of learners depicted in the three diagrams. For example, the student cohort learning Chinese in Australia includes second language, background, and first language learners, whereas the student cohort learning French in Australia comprises primarily second language learners. Each diagram represents a distinct learner group.
- 89. **Diagram 1** shows the relationship between indicative hours of study, achievement standards, and the most likely forms of provision for **second language learners**. It allows for flexible provision in primary years whereby systems and schools determine how the indicative hours are spread across the Foundation to Year 6 span. It envisages that the 350 hours will most likely be spread over a Foundation to Year 6 or Years 3 to 6 sequence. Because students may have the opportunity to begin learning a different or additional second language at secondary level, a commencement point is provided at this level.

90. **Diagram 2** shows the relationship between indicative hours of study, achievement standards, and the most likely forms of provision for **background language learners**. It allows for flexible provision in primary years whereby systems and schools determine how the indicative hours are spread across the Foundation to Year 6 span. It envisages that the 350 hours will most likely be spread over a Foundation to Year 6 or Years 3 to 6 sequence.
91. **Diagram 3** shows the relationship between indicative hours of study, achievement standards, and the most likely forms of provision for **first language learners** of specific languages.

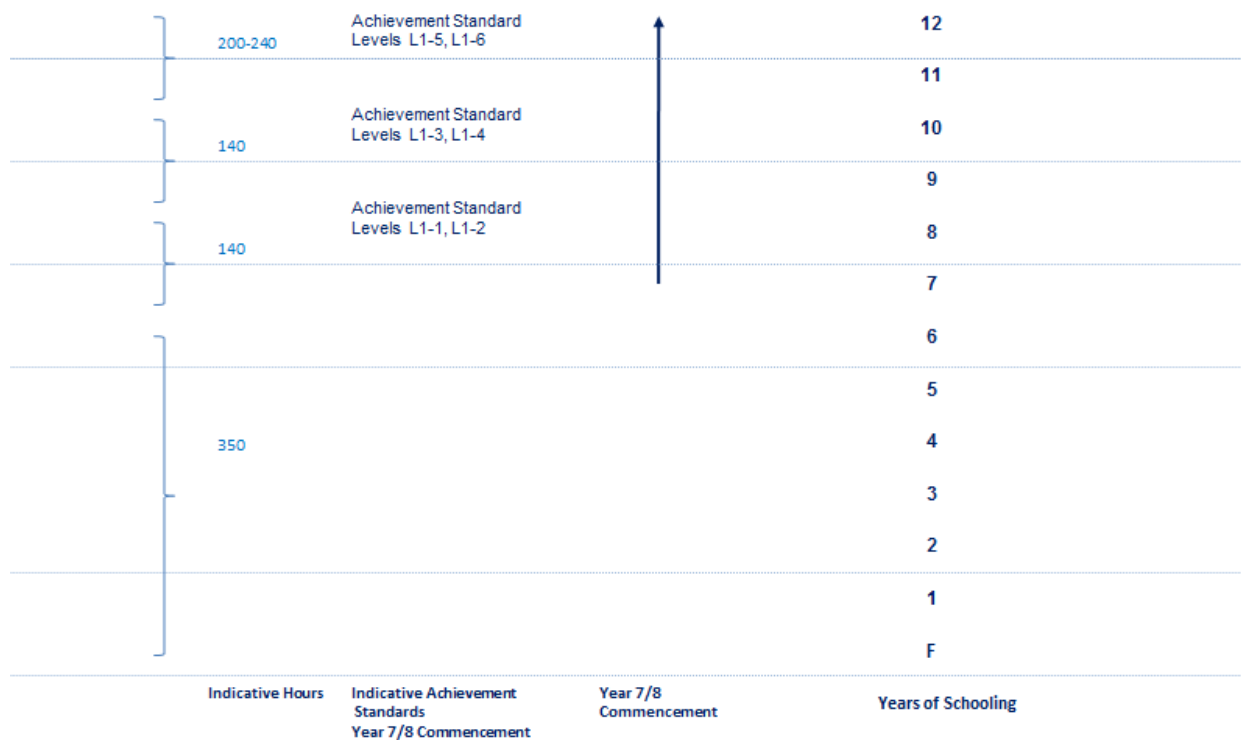
**Diagram 2 : Relationship between indicative hours of study and achievement standards — background language learners (BL**



**Diagram 1: Relationship between indicative hours of study and achievement standards — second language learners (L2)**



**Diagram 3: Relationship between indicative hours of study and achievement standards — first language learners (L1)**





## General capabilities and languages

92. The general capabilities described below have been developed as an integral dimension of learning in all learning areas that comprise the Australian Curriculum. In the Languages learning area they are realised in the following ways:
93. **Literacy:** Learning languages makes accessible to students additional literacy experiences and opportunities for the development of a broader range of literate practices. It strengthens language awareness and helps to develop a metalanguage, a language for thinking and talking about how language works.
94. **Numeracy:** Learning languages affords opportunities for learners to develop and use skills in numeracy to understand, analyse, categorise, critically respond to, and use mathematics in diverse contexts. They develop, use, and understand patterns, order, and relationships to reinforce concepts such as number, time, space in their own and in different cultural and linguistic systems.
95. **Information and communication technology competence:** Learning languages is enhanced through the use of target language multimodal resources, digital environments, and technologies that provide for both synchronous and asynchronous learning experiences. Accessing live target language environments and texts via digital media contributes to the development of information technology capabilities as well as linguistic and cultural knowledge. Accessing diverse real-time contexts extends the boundaries of the classroom.
96. **Critical and creative thinking:** Learning languages fosters creative thinking, enhances critical thinking, and encourages divergent and imaginative thinking. In learning a language, students broaden their thinking as they learn to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and as they explore and reflect critically. Seeing things from different perspectives helps them to become divergent thinkers. By learning to notice, connect, compare, and analyse aspects of the target language, students develop critical thinking skills as well as analytic and problem-solving skills.

97. **Ethical behaviour:** When learning another language, students are taught explicitly to acknowledge and value difference in their interactions with others and to develop respect for diverse ways of perceiving the world. Learning languages provides opportunities to reflect on and to adjust their own ethical points of view. In learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages, students should consider ethical behaviour in engaging with the owners and custodians of the languages. Students should also consider ethics in interpreting and translating, and when collecting and analysing primary data in research.
98. **Personal and social competence:** Interacting effectively in an additional language involves being able to negotiate and interpret meaning in a range of social and cultural situations. Being able to communicate successfully with people of diverse linguistic backgrounds requires the ability to understand and show empathy, both qualities of social competence. Being open-minded and recognising that people view and experience the world in different ways are essential aspects of learning another language. Learning to interact in a collaborative and respectful manner is a key element of personal and social competence.
99. **Intercultural understanding:** The development of intercultural understanding is a central aim of learning languages that emerges from and improves communication in the target language. It is an integral part of developing global citizenship and is a lifelong endeavour.

### Cross-curriculum priorities

100. The cross-curriculum priorities described below have been established as priorities that should be considered in all learning areas that comprise the Australian Curriculum. In the Languages learning area they are described as follows:
101. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures**  
A direct way of learning about and engaging with diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is to learn an Aboriginal language and/or a Torres Strait Islander language. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are an integral part of the learning of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages. There is an inseparable connection between Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages and land/Country, the environment, fauna, and flora.  
In learning all languages there is scope for making interlinguistic and intercultural comparisons across languages to illustrate concepts related to language and culture in general.

**102. Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia**

A direct means for learning about and engaging with the diverse countries and people within the Asian region is to learn an Asian language. Learning to communicate and to interact with intercultural sensitivity are fundamental to this engagement. When learning an Asian language students can explore concepts, experiences, and perspectives from within and across Asian cultures.

**103. Sustainability**

Learning languages can develop key concepts and capabilities that relate to sustainability.

Learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages contributes to the global effort to exchange knowledge among people with varied practices in caring for the land. It also contributes to the reconciliation process in Australia and goals for language revival.

## Further considerations in developing the Australian Curriculum: Languages

104. The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* has been designed to guide the development of languages curriculum developed by ACARA. It is anticipated that the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* will also be used to guide languages curriculum development undertaken by other organisations and that it will provide the basis for recognition of such curriculum by ACARA.
105. The *Australian Curriculum: Languages* will be conceptualised as a Foundation to Year 12 development. In the first instance, priority will be given to the development of curriculum content and achievement standards for Foundation to Year 10.
106. A set of common procedures and guidelines will be developed to guide teams working with the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* paper to develop curriculum content and achievement standards for specific languages in a consistent way.
107. For reasons of manageability of the language-specific curriculum development process, the *Australian Curriculum: Languages* will be staged. For each language, development will address the student pathways that are necessary for learning that particular language in the Australian context.
108. The development of a framework for Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages will be included in the first stage of development. It will elaborate on the diverse program types, content, and achievement standards related to each, as well as the protocols that must be followed in decision-making in learning and teaching Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages.
109. Decisions about the languages for which curriculum will be developed and the staging of this development will involve consideration of:
  - coverage of the maximum number of students
  - Australian Government priorities for language learning, notably the current priority on four Asian languages
  - languages most widely spoken by particular communities in Australia
  - community support, particularly from ethnic and community schools
  - languages of global importance
  - immigration and international students
  - economic significance.

110. Further discussions will occur with state and territory curriculum authorities on the languages for which F-10 curriculum will be developed. These discussions will focus on the following languages:  
Arabic, Auslan, Chinese, Classical languages, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese.
111. Further discussion will also occur with the Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities (ACACA) in relation to Years 11 and 12 in the context of the collaboration through the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages (CCAFL). This framework, which is a successor to NAFLaSSL (National Assessment Framework for Languages at Senior Secondary Level), has brought about national collaboration for some 25 years. It was designed initially to cater for small-candidature languages. It allows for collaborative syllabus development and formal assessment of small-candidature languages at senior secondary level, thereby ensuring that a significant number of students are able to present their particular language for formal study and assessment at Year 12 level. (Appendix 1 provides a list of languages in the CCAFL program.) Continuation of the CCAFL arrangements will ensure that the diversity of languages offered at senior secondary level, in particular the small-candidature languages is maintained.
112. Discussions will also continue with ACACA in relation to eligibility requirements for courses developed at senior secondary level. ACARA will seek advice from ACACA on incentives for students to undertake language studies at senior secondary level in all pathways in order to increase Australia's languages capability.
113. As with all learning areas, language curricula that are not developed as part of the *Australian Curriculum: Languages* can continue to be offered under existing state and territory arrangements.

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# Appendix 1

## Nationally Assessed Small-Candidature Languages offered through CCAFL 2011

The study of the following small-candidature languages at senior secondary level will continue through CCAFL arrangements (subject to CCAFL criteria being met).

Albanian

Auslan

Bosnian

Croatian

Dutch

Filipino

Hebrew

Hindi

Hungarian

Khmer

Macedonian

Malay

Maltese

Persian

Polish

Portuguese

Punjabi

Romanian

Russian

Serbian

Sinhala

Swedish

Tamil

Turkish

Ukrainian

Yiddish