

**INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES
SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 25 July 2020

Partially
Confidential

Dear Hon Mark Latham and NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education,
I am writing to this message to request the improvement of the second language education system in NSW.

The problems needing the reformation are;

1. Limited support to second language education between K to Y9 prior to commencing Y10 HSC language courses.
2. The strict eligibility criteria for HSC Asian four languages (Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean) limit students to be placed to their appropriate language level at around Y10.
3. Higher level language (in Context and Literature) courses are not provided in HSC Arabic and European languages taken at around Y10.
4. As many as two to five different level HSC language exams complicate the assessment of the proficiency of students achieved and discourage them from undertaking higher level courses.

The language education in NSW currently disincentivises or prevents a significant group of students from pursuing appropriate levels of language learning.

The eligibility criteria imposed on the students with an Asian background to take a certain level of the language course is an issue. “Continuers” course, for example, limits the students’ enrolment as follows;

- Students have had no more than one year’s formal education from the first year of primary education (Year 1) in a school where the language is the medium of instruction.
- Students have had no more than three years residency in the past 10 years in a country where the language is the medium of communication.
- Students do not use the language for sustained communication outside the classroom with someone with a background in using the language.

European languages educations also significantly fall behind. For the native speaker of English brought up in Australia, achieving a reasonable proficiency in major European languages is more accessible than learning Asian languages. There are always students who demonstrate excellence in literacy in any languages. Arabic is another language need to be focused. Considering the number of skilled migrants with the background of Arabic speaker, Australia should take an advantage of these population. Not providing the higher level language course equivalent to Asian “in Context” or “Literature” especially in major European languages and Arabic also depriving our students of the chance of pursuing the achievement of higher level.

The NSW curriculum review lead by Prof Goeff Masters also pointed out the followings. It also recognises that students have varying cultural and language backgrounds and that these can result in mismatches between the assumptions and expectations of schools and those of local

communities, and so place some students at a disadvantage. Effective teaching recognises and takes advantage of students' varying backgrounds and starting points, adapting and contextualising the content of the curriculum as appropriate. (NSW Curriculum Review; April 2020. p74)

There are thousands of individual variations of background; therefore, the student him/herself has to be focused. The students' proficiency of the language should be assessed by placement exam before the beginning of the course. Since the HSC final language exams are divided into two (Arabic and some European languages) to as many as five (Asian four languages) levels, it is difficult to estimate the true proficiency of the second language of students. Moreover, it sometimes causes controversial games by students who tried to gain better marks by taking a lower level of the course.

The students who made an effort to study challenging levels of Asian language are especially disadvantaged by giving lower ATAR scaling. The mean of Japanese "Literature (the top level)" ATAR for example, was 24.3 which is virtually the same as "Beginners" which is 23.7 in 2019 UAC report. Unfortunately, many students have learnt Asian languages at primary school stop learning it after graduation as they know that they are disadvantaged by choosing a language course in HSC exam. The final HSE language exam can be designed similar to IELTS (International English Language Testing System) assessing all the levels of proficiency in four aspects with reasonable accuracy. The problem of bargaining the level of a language course would also resolve as everybody has to aim for the high score in the final year uniform exam. To improve the second language education system in NSW, I wish to propose the followings:

1. Mandatory second language education from Kindy to Y9 in NSW.
2. The elimination of "eligibility criteria" for the enrolment of the level of the second language course. The course enrolment is determined by a placement exam in all the languages not by a background.
3. The students who have demonstrated a higher level of language proficiency than extension should be accommodated to learn "in context" or "literature" course level in all languages as possible.
4. The introduction of a unified HSC exam for each language which can assess all levels of proficiency similar to IELTS. The students who demonstrated good competence would consequently obtain higher HSC marking and ATAR in the language exam.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to see the improved outcome of the inquiry of NSW educational curriculum.

Sincerely yours,