



dhcs | ACT

DISCUSSION PAPER FOR ACT LANGUAGES POLICY



Languages for all Canberrans

Office of Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

*The Office of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander Affairs would
like to acknowledge
and thank members of
the ACT Languages
Policy Community
Steering Committee for
their support and work
preparing this document.*

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

I am pleased to provide this paper to stimulate discussion in the community on the important subject of developing a Languages Policy for the ACT.

The idea for a languages policy for the ACT was raised by many Canberrans who attended the 2005 and 2008 Multicultural Summits.

The theme of 'languages' was especially topical in 2008, which was the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's International Year of Languages.

Languages matter! was the theme of the International Year of Languages. This reality—and the need for promoting this concept—was strongly emphasised at the 2008 Multicultural Summit. Two rounds of community consultations during 2009 also strongly supported this suggestion.

The *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010–2013*, was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly in December 2009. Included in the 'Languages' focus area of the Strategy is a commitment by the ACT Government to develop and implement a whole-of-government language policy by 2012.

I look forward to receiving your comments on what you believe should be covered in an ACT Languages Policy.

Joy Burch MLA
Minister for Multicultural Affairs



Level 2
Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre
North Building
180 London Circuit
Canberra City ACT 2601

Postal address
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA ACT 2601

T 6207 0555
E DHCSOMATSIA@act.gov.au
W www.dhcs.act.gov.au/matsia

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AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LANGUAGES



The ACT Government recognises that there were several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken in the Canberra region. In keeping with standard practice, these languages are collectively referred to as 'Australian languages'.

The ACT Government acknowledges and respects the continuing significance of Australian languages for the heritage and cultural prosperity of this region. Every effort will be made to retain, preserve and use Australian languages in the ACT region.

PURPOSE

The ACT Languages Policy will provide a framework to assist ACT Government agencies in meeting their obligations according to Australian and ACT laws and the human rights principles which the ACT Government is committed to in regard to language acquisition and accessibility.

It will be used to support language related policy directions outlined in *The Canberra Plan*, *The Canberra Social Plan*, the *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010–2013* and other relevant ACT strategic planning documents.

DEFINITIONS

Language	Refers to written, spoken and sign forms of language
Multilingual	Ability to use more than two languages
Bilingual	Ability to use two languages
Economic capital	Trade, tourism and employment gains or advantages afforded by knowledge of language
Human capital	An individual's knowledge and skills related to language includes literacy in languages and culture
Social capital	Advantages gained through relationships and networks, both formal and informal
Minority	People who speak a language other than English as their first language in Australia

PRINCIPLES

The ACT Languages Policy discussion paper is founded on four overarching principles:

- 1 *Language is an element of human rights*
- 2 *Language is closely linked with personal and cultural identity*
- 3 *Language is an essential tool in the social organisation of a community*
- 4 *Language is the basis of cognitive and educational development*

CONTEXT

At a glance

- Canberra does not have a whole-of-government policy on language.
- Other States and the Northern Territory have a variety of policies dealing with language services or teaching of languages, but not a broad languages policy.
- Australia last had a national language policy in 1987. New national policies deal with specific aspects of language, such as language education.
- In August 2009, for the first time in Australia's history, the Commonwealth Government launched a strategy for preserving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, *Indigenous Languages—A National Approach 2009*. The National Approach sets out the Commonwealth Government's plan to preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages through targeted actions.
- The United Nations has developed recommendations of linguistic rights which are based upon human rights laws.

Influencing policies

National Policy on Languages (NPL), 1987

Features National bilingualism, language as a right

Focus

- competence in English
- maintenance and development of languages other than English
- provision of language services
- opportunities for learning second languages

The Australian Languages and Literacy Policy (ALLP), 1991

Features Language as a resource, cultural diversity

Focus

- English for all
- support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages
- second language for all
- language services for all

National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Strategy (NALSAS), 1994

Features Focus on economic needs—trade and tourism

Focus

- Asian languages taught: Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Indonesian

Commonwealth Literacy Policy (CLP), 1996

Features Teaching of English language from early age with external testing to national standards

Focus

- standardised testing of English language skills reported

Oslo Recommendations on Linguistic Rights of National Minorities, 1998

Features Language related issues addressed

Focus

- individuals' names
- religion
- community life and non-government organisations
- economic life
- administrative authorities and public services
- independent national institutions
- judicial authorities
- deprivation of liberties

Other relevant Australian documents

- *Melbourne Declaration*
- *National Plan for Languages 2005–08*
- *Indigenous Languages Education Report*
- *Indigenous Languages National Policy Statement*

Canberra is a multilingual city

A multilingual city is one where different languages become part of the natural development of the community as a whole. It is where a range of languages are spoken at home, in public, in education and in the media, where a variety of languages are used, respected and referred to in our daily lives.

Crucially, it is where languages are on offer to be learnt and used by Canberrans interested, in them as well as those who are historically and culturally connected to them.

A range of languages and cultures serve to widen our daily experiences and thinking. By having knowledge of another language we can increase our knowledge, cultural engagement and extend our thinking.¹ Languages can also lead us to think and respond to life differently. They may enable us to feel more inspired and satisfied with our lives.

This policy recognises that standard Australian English is the national, convenient and shared language of Australia and its major official institutions.²

It also recognises that 14 per cent of the ACT's population speaks languages other than English at home. Around two per cent of the population does not speak English well or at all. It appreciates that approximately 170 languages³ are used in the ACT, and that other languages include languages used by people who are deaf or blind or by people who have physical or intellectual limitations.

The ACT Government is dedicated to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to preserve, maintain and revitalise their many languages and cultures within and beyond the ACT. Support for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages in the ACT will contribute to the maintenance of the wellbeing of its local Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and provide further impetus for gaining ground in overcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait disadvantage.⁴ Australia is a place where languages are disappearing at a faster rate than anywhere else in the world. There is significant research which demonstrates that strong culture and identity are protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, assisting in developing resilience.⁵

1 SUMES, 1994, 7.

2 J Lo Bianco, 1990.

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006.

4 www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications/

5 www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sireport09/chap3.html

LAW, POLICY AND COMMUNITY



In the ACT, cultural and language diversity are supported through:

1

Law

2

Policy

3

Community connectedness

Support for languages through these aspects of the ACT Government systems helps in overcoming intercultural tension and opens access to services and opportunities for social and economic participation.⁶

Protective laws

The objective of the ACT's *Human Rights Act 2004* is to ensure that individuals can live with dignity and value. The Act protects rights such as equality⁷ and freedom from discrimination, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and of association as well as the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to minorities including language rights.

Language rights are intended to allow people to resist forced cultural assimilation and to protect minorities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In the ACT, Section 27 of the *Human Rights Act 2004* states that anyone who belongs to an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority must not be denied the right, with other members of the minority, to use their language.

Under the *Human Rights Act 2004*, ACT public authorities must act compatibly with human rights and, in making decisions, give proper consideration to human rights⁸.

The Act draws upon the following international instruments which Australia has signed and which can be used to interpret rights under the Act. These instruments also deal with language policy issues:

- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 1)
- *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (Article 2) (Article 19) (Article 21) (Article 22) (Article 27)
- *UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (Article 2 (1))
- *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Article (Article 28) (Article 29)
- *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (Article 13) (Article 14)
- *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (Article 14 (3)) (Article 11).

The ACT's *Discrimination Act 1991* also provides that it is unlawful to treat someone unfavourably in public life because of his or her race. This includes in the provision of goods or services as well as provision of education or employment.

⁶ Oslo Recommendations regarding the linguistic rights of national minorities and explanatory note. February 1998

⁷ Section 8 ACT *Human Rights Act 2004*

⁸ Section 40B ACT *Human Rights Act 2004*

Supportive policy

ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010–2013

The *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010–2013* has two objectives relating to languages:

- to provide opportunities for all Canberrans to value, acquire, utilise and maintain language skills for the benefit of the community
- to ensure that services and programs are accessible to all Canberrans who do not speak the English language well or at all.

Within the Strategy are listed a number of actions which aim to support the achievement of these aims which include:

- develop a whole-of-government language policy for the ACT by 2012
- all year 3–8 students at ACT Government schools study a language other than English by 2011
- one hundred per cent of ACT Government publications, including websites, include accessibility block information.⁹



Community connectedness

*Extension of opportunities for language learning can increase links between individuals and the wider community, fostering intercultural harmony and understanding as well as providing English speakers with opportunities to broaden their personal, linguistic and cultural horizons.*¹⁰

The benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism to the ACT community are already recognised in the key areas of education and strengthening and expanding the economy, by creating jobs, businesses and increasing investment. These benefits are promoted whenever the opportunity is appropriate.

Multilingualism has also been recognised as being 'part of a way of establishing social cohesion and tolerance within a pluralistic society'.¹¹ The *National Statement for Languages Education* also emphasises 'social cohesion through better communication and understanding' as one of the goals of promoting languages learning in Australia.¹²

The ability to speak one's mother tongue bestows various social, emotional, employment, cognitive and health advantages. Bilingualism provides yet another layer of advantage for minority language speakers. Keeping their mother tongue and then mastering English for example, provides minority language speakers the advantage of being able to operate in different contexts. This in turn increases one's life chances and employment options.¹³

The ACT Government recognises that parents have a role to play in motivating their children to learn languages. It recognises that children's cultural and linguistic experiences at home are the foundation of their future learning¹⁴ and the key to the success of language education. The ACT Government will continue to support these family influences on language learning.

Social capital, human capital and economic capital are enhanced in the ACT because of the highly active diplomatic presence and the 450 multicultural community organisations, groups and energetic individuals. These combine to strengthen and connect our multilingual community.

⁹ ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010–2013 (2009)

¹⁰ Language Awareness. National Congress on Languages in Education Assembly (4th, York, England, July 1984). NCLE Papers and Reports 6

¹¹ Liddicoat, 2010, p2.

¹² National Statement for Languages Education: 2005, p2

¹³ www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport09/chap3.html#s3_4

¹⁴ Cummins J. *Bilingual Children's Mother Tongue: Why it is important for education?* Sprogfourm Nr 19 2001 p20.

GOALS

The overarching goal of the ACT Language policy will be to:

Encourage and provide opportunities for Canberrans to develop language skills and abilities so that they may access and shape the delivery of ACT Government services so that all can contribute to the social and economic life of Canberra.

Approach

The ACT Government and its agencies will approach implementation of the Language Policy in a systematic manner. The ACT Government and its agencies will:

- engage multilingual communities as key participants in the processes of language maintenance, acquisition, learning/education and utilisation
- engage local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in developing programs to support their languages
- ensure that resulting policies pertaining to language will be evidence-based and call upon technical expertise for their ongoing development
- in broad consultation with relevant community groups, develop and publicise agency level language policies
- review policies at reasonable time intervals and as issues arise
- where practical, support businesses and community organisations to develop their own language policies
- ensure that the teaching, learning and maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages progresses in close consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We would like your feedback on the following issues...

1

WHAT OTHER LANGUAGE POLICIES, PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR INFORMING THE ACT LANGUAGE POLICY?

The three aspects of the ACT Language Policy goal—law, policy, and community connectedness—outlined above are addressed under the following headings which arise out of the Oslo Recommendations regarding the linguistic rights of national minorities.

Names

The ability to use one's own name in public and in private is an aspect of social inclusion and commitment to providing an environment which is free of discrimination.

- People, cultural associations and businesses can use names in their own language.
- Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander names for geographical features and in naming parks, streets, boulevards, buildings, rooms, etc.¹⁵
- People can use their names in their own language.

2

WHAT ELSE COULD SUPPORT PEOPLE TO USE NAMES IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE?

Religion and Community life

All people including those who do not speak English can establish and manage their own organisations, associations and institutions in the languages of their choosing to enable religious belief and its practice "in community".

- The ACT Government will actively support activities which take place in languages other than English through financial resources such as through ACT Government grant programs.
- The ACT Government, in partnership with community language schools, will create opportunities for children and adults to develop an ever widening range of language skills to enable them to participate in community life.
- The ACT Government, along with community partners such as the ACT Ethnic Schools Association Inc, embassies and high commissions, multicultural community groups and schools will provide opportunities to celebrate and promote the learning of languages, particularly those spoken in ACT families. This will occur through community events, including but not limited to, International Mother Language Day, Harmony Day and the annual National Multicultural Festival.

3

WHAT OTHER CONSIDERATIONS COULD BE INTRODUCED TO ENSURE THAT PEOPLE FROM ALL LANGUAGE GROUPS ARE ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY LIFE?

Media

People who speak languages other than English can establish and maintain their own language in the media.

- Local media regulation will be based on objective and non-discriminatory criteria.
- Language groups in the ACT should have access to ACT based broadcast time in their own language on locally funded media.
- The ACT Government will encourage local media to provide information, entertainment and cultural events to people who use languages other than English.
- The ACT Government and agencies will increase use of electronic media including multilingual broadcasting for communication with service users who speak little or no English.
- ACT Government will provide financial and social support for local media in languages other than English.

4

WHAT MEASURES COULD ENSURE MEDIA IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH ARE EQUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE AND OF A HIGH STANDARD?

Economic life

Employment and participation in the economic life of the ACT requires ability in the English language.

There is broad recognition of the economic benefit from knowledge of other languages and cultures, and strong translating and interpreting skills. This is particularly important in the ACT, which has increased economic reliance on tourism, global markets, trade, and international education.

All people, including those who speak languages other than English, have the right to operate private businesses in the languages of their choice within the parameters of Australian laws.

- The ACT Government encourages competency in English language proficiency. The ACT Government will consult with businesses to ensure flexible provision of English language learning and literacy to accommodate individual needs.
- ACT Government agencies will provide opportunities to develop social, economic and human capital of the ACT through supportive programs and grants.
- The ACT Government will pursue opportunities for promotion and provision of English language education to students and teachers from other countries.
- Ensure that accredited translators and interpreters are available for workplace safety information.

5

HOW CAN WE PROMOTE THE BENEFITS OF BILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUALISM IN A DIVERSE WORKFORCE?

Public services

Effective delivery of public services relies upon effective communication. The ACT Government is committed to providing equitable access to public services.

Access to language services¹⁶ is one way to ensure that public services are responsive to the community that they serve.

- In instances where a person cannot read or write English well or at all, they will have access to accredited interpreters¹⁷ or other language services as appropriate. This will include the provision of either male or female interpreters when requested.¹⁸
- ACT public servants will be provided ongoing training to enable them to provide services which are both accessible and delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.
- Important public documents should be available in the languages of significant population groups.
- ACT Library and Information Services will provide multilingual resources. This includes for people with literacy difficulties and for people who live with disabilities which effect communication.
- ACT Government services will promote access to interpreter information in public places.
- The ACT Government will promote activities in the community to raise awareness of the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the valuable contribution that they make to the Canberra community.
- English used by the ACT Government and agencies will be clear and plain, without stereotyping.
- The ACT Government will promote and support the development, recording and accessibility of languages, stories and history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the ACT.

6

WHAT FURTHER INITIATIVES OR STRATEGIES COULD BE INTRODUCED TO ENSURE ACCESS TO SERVICES IN THE ACT?

¹⁶ Language services include tools for communication with people who speak little or no English or whose first language is Auslan (Australian Sign Language). These include use of interpreters, provision of translated materials, employing staff who can provide service to clients in a language other than English, using multilingual staff to provide interpreting.

¹⁷ Interpreters are people who convey an oral or signed message or statement from one language to another language. A translator is a person who makes a written or visual transfer of a message or statement from one language to another. NAATI accredits interpreters and translators in Australia.

¹⁸ When using the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), a requirement is to identify if there is a gender preference for the interpreter.

Justice and the law

The legal and criminal justice system must accommodate the diversity of the community to ensure that effective communication with community members can occur.

This must include all aspects of dealing with the law such as: road rules; the court process; detention and imprisonment. These can be complex matters for individuals to understand. As such, all published material about the legal and criminal justice system will aim to be written in clear, concise English.

The ACT Government will also ensure that information about the legal and criminal justice systems is available in other formats and in other languages, where appropriate.

The ACT Government will also work collaboratively with community groups to ensure that practical and tailored support can be provided to individuals.

- Detained people and people who are involved in the court process have the right to accredited interpreters and translators.
- People involved in the legal profession (police, lawyers and public servants) will have cross cultural awareness training.
- People are allowed to communicate in their own language both orally and in writing, within the limitations of the law.

7

WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED TO ENSURE JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE WHO SPEAK LITTLE OR NO ENGLISH?

Language education

Culture and language are interdependent, and each is a window into the other. Studying other cultures and their languages enhances intercultural understanding and understanding of society more broadly.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities provides that teaching of minority languages shall be implemented without prejudice to the learning of the official language or teaching in this language; in Australia English is the official language.

There is a clear link between the learning of languages and improved literacy skills for all language learners. Even limited experience of the learning of languages is shown to increase cognitive development and mental ability.

School Language Education

- Currently, eight languages are supported in ACT public schools by the Department of Education and Training. These are: French, German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Indonesian, Korean and Japanese. By 2011 all students from year 3–8 in ACT public schools will study a language other than English with mandated minimum time allocations.
- The ACT Department of Education and Training's *Languages Support Plan* oversees a budget for teacher professional learning and language learning resources to support the effective teaching and learning of languages in the Territory.
- In the ACT, the Department of Education and Training will continue to collaborate with university faculties involved in languages teaching and language teacher training.
- *The National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2004–2008* provides an overarching framework for state, territory and Australian government activities. An inter-jurisdictional working group works collaboratively to implement and monitor this Plan and the National Statement for Languages Education in Australian Schools. The ACT Government and its agencies will reflect the *ACT Language Policy* principles and goals in planning and representation at a national level.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

- Students in ACT public schools will be taught the importance of Australian languages in the context of incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective in the curriculum. In particular, aspects of languages from Australian language groups represented in the ACT.
- The ACT Government will support programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults to learn and maintain their languages and culture.
- The provision of scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher and teacher assistants will support the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum.

Adult/Community Language Education

- Developing students' mother language and literacy has been found to support their conceptual and personal development, as well as learning English literacy.¹⁹ As such, the ACT Government will encourage students, multilingual competency in order to maximise their access to the mainstream curriculum.
- "Mainstream schools alone cannot provide the entire range of languages that learners may wish to study. Providing a wide range of languages is achieved through:
 - collaboration among mainstream schools, distance education providers and government schools of languages
 - in the case of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, schools working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
 - after hours ethnic/community language schooling can provide this range".²⁰
- The ACT Government currently provides direct support to 37 community language schools in the ACT through multicultural language grants, multicultural radio grants and multicultural community grants. Indirect ongoing funding to these language schools is also provided via the ACT Ethnic Schools Association by the ACT Department of Education and Training.
- Learning languages other than English should be available to adults as well as children in the ACT. Education for adults should be consistent with adult learning principles.²¹
- Adult English language literacy will be supported through ACT Government training providers.

8

ARE THERE OTHER ISSUES OR STRATEGIES THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED TO ENCOURAGE LEARNING OF ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES?

9

ARE THERE OTHER FACTORS APPROPRIATE TO FORM THE BASIS OF THE ACT LANGUAGES POLICY? WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE? WHAT OTHER IDEAS WOULD YOU EXPLORE?

¹⁹ Cummins 2000; Clyne 2005.

²⁰ National Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005–2008. p7

²¹ Adult learning principles include the following: Adults are internally motivated and self-directed; adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences; adults are goal orientated; adults are relevancy oriented; adults are practical; and adult learners like to be respected. For more details see: www.qotfc.edu.au/resource/index.html?page=65375



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HOW TO RESPOND TO THIS DISCUSSION PAPER

Throughout this Discussion Paper there are a series of questions about how to ensure that the ACT Languages Policy meets the needs of the community.

You can provide a written submission or informal note or letter by:



POST

Office of Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Discussion Paper Comments
GPO Box 158, CANBERRA ACT 2601

EMAIL

DHCSOMATSIA@act.gov.au

THE CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS 5PM 28 FEBRUARY 2011