



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Multicultural Education and Languages Committee (MELC)

Report for the Minister for Education



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South Australia

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The Multicultural Education and Languages Committee (MELC)
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Introduction from the Chair



At the risk of stating the obvious, 2020 was a year like no other. The pandemic has reshaped the global order, creating major challenges for humanity; local communities, educators, their families and students have not remained untouched. Linguistic and cultural diversity, already a characteristic of every community and every educational institution, has gained additional hues. Issues of fairness and justice for all students have become more marked. Systems have been challenged to find ways of communicating vital information to individuals and families who are users of languages other than English. Some students and teachers have experienced discrimination and racism. Elements of prejudice have always existed, unhelpful as it has always been, but

somehow, with the disruption caused by COVID, there is now an intensification.

The MELC has sought throughout the year to draw attention to issues of racism as a major concern and the need for individuals, schools and communities to address such distinctive sentiments and behaviours. This will remain pressing in coming years and goes to the culture and ethos of our educational environments. The MELC will continue to draw attention to and act upon this problem in order to contribute to creating cultures in all facets of education that are respectful of differences and instil in all the capability to live together in positive ways.

In such a tumultuous year, I wish to thank the lead thinkers, educators (both leaders and teachers) and community groups with whom we have had the privilege to interact, and as Chair, I thank a most dedicated, thoughtful and resourceful committee for their rich contributions.

Associate Professor Angela Scarino
Chair, MELC
March 2021

The Committee

Role and purpose

The Ministerial Advisory Committee: Multicultural Education and Languages (MELC) provides advice to the South Australian Minister for Education on three interrelated areas of education: languages education, multicultural education and the internationalisation of education. It works across the three schooling sectors and its work encompasses the Ethnic and Community Schools Languages Program.

In undertaking this work, the committee draws upon contemporary research, policy and practices available locally, nationally and internationally, and the knowledge, expertise and experience of committee members.

Though the work of MELC encompasses these three named areas, it needs to be recognised that the focus on linguistic and cultural diversity, which is the overarching theme of MELC's work, permeates all areas and dimensions of education, and as such it pertains to all learners, to all areas of learning and to all schools and early childhood settings.

The committee is supported by the External Relations Directorate within the Strategic Policy and External Relations (SPER) Division of the Department for Education.

Terms of reference

The committee is responsible for providing advice to the Minister on:

- developing strategies for promoting, enhancing and strengthening languages education, including English as an additional language or dialect (EALD)
- developing understandings and practices in schools to:
 - engage children and young people with linguistic and cultural diversity
 - develop intercultural capabilities of children and young people to enable them to contribute as global citizens
- supporting schools to increase the number of students successfully studying a language
- supporting the maintenance and development of languages and cultures in all South Australian schools and ethnic and community schools
- expanding the capacity for ethnic and community language schools to provide SACE languages subjects
- supporting the internationalisation of teaching and learning in South Australia
- developing models for the professional development of teachers of languages
- other matters referred to it by the Minister.

MELC membership

Members of MELC (see Table 1) are appointed by the Minister for Education. Members are appointed on the basis of their knowledge and experience of multicultural education, languages education and the internationalisation of education. Associate Professor Angela Scarino has been the Chair of MELC from its inception in December 2015 and was Chair of the former MELC from 2013 to 2015.

Table 1: MELC members during 2020

Institutional nominees

Ms Panayoula Parha	Department for Education
Ms Anna Mirasgentis	Catholic Education South Australia (CESA)
Mrs Deb Dalwood	Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA)
Professor John West-Sooby	South Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (SAVCC)
Ms Toni Cocchiaro OAM	South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission (SAMEAC)
Mr Darryl Buchanan	The Ethnic Schools Association of South Australia (ESASA)
Ms Meridie Howley	SACE Board of South Australia
Associate Professor Harry Savelsberg	Multicultural Youth SA (MYSA)
Minister's nominees	
Associate Professor Angela Scarino	Chairperson, independent
Ms Lia Tedesco	Educational leader (Principal, Director)
Dr Michelle Kohler	Leading educator
Ms Shamsiya Mohammadi	Student nominee
Ms Olga Kostic	Parent nominee
Ms Inawantji Scales	Aboriginal person
Mr Airedy Yara	Community nominee
Ms Jasmine Millbanks	Early Childhood/Preschool Director

MELC secretariat

The committee's secretariat provides research, as well as administrative and organisational support. In 2020 secretarial support for MELC was 0.5 FTE. Ms Suzanne Bradshaw was the Executive Officer.

MELC meetings

Four meetings were held in 2020 (see Table 2). The first meeting was held at Thebarton Senior College and the remaining 3 meetings were held via video conference in accordance with COVID-19 protocols. At each meeting representatives from a particular sector/organisation/community group are invited to present to the committee on the achievements and challenges in their particular context. This provides MELC members with the opportunity to experience firsthand the programs being run in the fields of languages education, multicultural education and the internationalisation of education. It also provides the opportunity to canvas diverse perspectives to enrich members' own understandings and enable the committee to better inform the Minister.

Reports from members are an important part of MELC's information-sharing processes. They provide a mechanism for keeping MELC up to date with what is happening in the sectors and organisations represented on the committee.

Table 2: MELC Meetings 2020

Date	Theme	Presenter/s
5 March 2020	EALD – student diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms Eva Kannis-Torry, Principal, Thebarton Senior College and Ms Fatima Shah, student Thebarton Senior College
7 May 2020	Impact of COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members – impact of COVID-19 in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity
30 July 2020	The Review of the Australian Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Peta Smith, Executive Director, SPER, Department for Education and Mr Ken Lountain, A/Director, Strategic Design, Department for Education – Review of the Australian Curriculum Ms Dimi Rumpe, Senior Social Worker, MYSA – an overview of MYSA services
5 November 2020	Internationalisation of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms Panayoula Parha, Director, Secondary Learners Directorate and Ms Ilana Nichol, Project Officer, International Education Strategy, Department for Education – the Department for Education’s International Education Strategy

Meetings with the Minister

Two meetings are held with the Minister for Education each year for MELC to report on the progress of its agenda and to respond to Ministerial requests.

The meeting scheduled on 31 March was cancelled owing to the coronavirus pandemic. The Chair, executive officer and Professor John West-Sooby had an extended meeting with the Minister on 29 September 2020 to discuss advice provided on the MELC priorities and in particular the impact of COVID-19 in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Meetings with Strategic Policy and External Relations

Regular meetings are held between the Chair and the Executive Director, SPER, to better connect the work of MELC to the Department for Education’s advisory processes, to maximise the use of MELC’s advice to inform policies and practices of the Department for Education.

- 17 February 2020 – Meeting with Dr Peta Smith, Executive Director, SPER
- 12 May 2020 – Meeting with Mr David Ensor, Director, External Relations

- 9 September 2020 – Meeting with Dr Peta Smith, Executive Director, SPER

Provision of policy, strategy and advice

In current times it is all the more vital that education for and in linguistic and cultural diversity remains at the forefront of the education agenda and is considered core.

It is a reality that schools and classrooms are now more linguistically and culturally diverse than at any other time and the teaching force itself is more diverse. The impact is such that, for example, curricula and assessment need to cater for a greater degree of diversity of learners and learning; preschools need to manage the home-to-preschool transition from more diverse homes; parental engagement includes engagement with parents of students of non-English speaking backgrounds; and work with Aboriginal communities and education needs to cater for the linguistic and cultural diversity that is represented in this community.

Since knowledge is culturally formed and applied, and since language is a central mediating resource for learning, we see language as crucial to learning. As such, linguistic and cultural diversity is best seen not as a trait but as constitutive of all learning.

During 2020 MELC provided advice in the areas as outlined below.

Provision of advice to the Minister on the impact of COVID-19 in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity

The focus of the MELC meeting held on 7 May 2020 was discussion on the impact of COVID-19 in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity. Reports from members indicated the vulnerability of diverse communities had become even more marked and there remains concern about a backlash against the diversity agenda in society, with impact on access and equity.

A summary of the major themes from the various tabled reports and discussion were provided to the Minister to inform future planning.

Provision of advice to the Parent Engagement Strategy

In May 2020, the Parent Engagement in Learning project team, Department for Education, approached MELC for assistance in organising a focus group of parents from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds as part of their consultation process. The focus group was held on Thursday 11 June 2020. Participants were asked what they currently do to engage with their children's learning, what they see as their role, and how the department can more effectively support parents to engage in appropriate ways at school and at home.

The MELC Parent Engagement subcommittee met with the Department's Parent Engagement subcommittee on 26 August 2021. Foregrounding linguistic and cultural diversity, the following matters were discussed.

- current facilitators and barriers to engagement
- similarities and differences – how best to tailor an approach to support the diversity of communities
- the nature of supports that the Department for Education could offer to foster engagement.

The department again requested MELC's assistance to organise a meeting to test its policy ideas with a group of parents involved with MYSA. This meeting was held on 2 November 2020. MYSA is the state representative, advisory, advocacy and service delivery body for young people aged 10–30 years. It is the only youth-specific

multicultural agency in South Australia. MYSA services approximately 4000 young people per year, most of whom have high and complex needs. It is the peak body in South Australia for refugee youth.

Multicultural Legislative Review

In 2019 the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, through Multicultural Affairs, undertook a review of the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission Act 1980, the key piece of legislation specific to our state's multiculturalism. The review provided an opportunity to modernise the Act in light of South Australia's increasingly complex linguistic and cultural diversity and to develop a new multicultural policy that reflects the state's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

Believing it to be both warranted and timely, MELC welcomed the Multicultural Legislative Review and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to it. The Bill was discussed at the MELC meeting held on Thursday 5 November 2020. Some matters raised by members in relation to the Bill were brought to the Minister's attention. These included:

- Whilst the term 'ethnic' has been dropped, the Bill still retains an ethnically based orientation with a homogenous view of culture and a view of multiculturalism that suggests it refers to 'others' and not to mainstream society. Multiculturalism pertains to society as a whole.
- The silence on Language and languages in the definitional work in the Bill is highly problematic. A contemporary view of multiculturalism must encompass a commitment to multilingualism, because language is the major carrier of culture.
- Although the Commission is retained as an independent statutory body, its functions, roles and responsibilities have been diminished precisely at a time of greater complexity in the social and economic fabric of the state.
- The composition of the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission and the selection process is not part of the new Bill.
- The relationship between the Act, the principles and the new South Australian Multicultural Charter should be clarified and addressed in the Act itself.
- It is crucial to capture a policy, principles and a charter that encapsulates a contemporary vision of this area sufficient to take our state into the future.

Early Learning Strategy

On 18 November 2020, the MELC Early Learning subcommittee met with Dr Caroline Crosser-Barlow, Executive Director, Early Years and Child Development, Department for Education to introduce the committee's work, to establish dialogue and to discuss points of mutual interest.

In December 2020, MELC provided a submission to the department as part of the consultation process on the development of an Early Learning Strategy. The MELC welcomes the opportunity to be involved in this process.

Research activities

The MELC provides educational leadership and high-level expert advice and shares expertise in contemporary research, policy and practices relating to languages education, multicultural education and internationalisation of education.

During 2020 MELC provided advice as outlined below.

International Baccalaureate Diploma Languages programs

In 2019, the Minister requested MELC's advice and perspectives on the value of the Languages programs at the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma schools selected as part of the department's Languages in Schools initiative, a program to enhance languages learning in government schools. During 2019, MELC conducted interviews with the Languages team, Department for Education; Glenunga International High School; the principals of the 4 selected schools (Aberfoyle Park High School, Norwood Morialta High School, Roma Mitchell Secondary School and Unley High School); the principal of Adelaide High School; the president of the South Australian Secondary Principals' Association; and personnel within the International Baccalaureate Organisation.

Key findings were discussed at a MELC meeting in March 2020.

An advice paper, 'International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme as an element of the Languages in Schools Initiatives', was provided to the Minister. A summary of the advice follows.

Summary advice

A valuable additional pathway

The IB Diploma Programme is a sound program that offers a highly valued international award that recognises in its design the integral role of languages learning. It is a rich and rigorous award that provides intellectual stretch for students who choose it as their senior secondary pathway. As such, its introduction can contribute positively to the intended outcomes of the Languages in Schools initiative. The 4 schools selected for this element of the initiative are being required to consider their Languages provision most carefully.

All the selected schools appreciate the value of the IB program as an additional structural pathway for particular groups of students, one that ensures student retention in languages learning and develops intercultural capabilities and international-mindedness. They also value the professional learning that is offered through the IB.

It is clear that the IB program not only values language learning but places Languages at the core of the curriculum. In this sense, languages are treated as essential rather than optional learning for all students. This framing has merit and consideration should be given to how this positioning of language learning can be translated/transferred into a wider range of schools.

Impact

It is recognised that the impact of this element of the Languages in Schools initiative:

- can become evident only from 2022 and beyond

- will relate to the 4 schools only at this stage.

To maximise its value for a larger number of students, it would be necessary to introduce a larger number of IB Diploma Programmes and conduct a formal evaluation of the impact following a period of implementation.

Evaluation strategy

An evaluation strategy should be developed to collect the following information from each of the schools:

- Quantitative data on how many students start the IB and remain in the program for the 2 years (eg Glenunga International High School reports a 25% attrition)
- The number of SACE students who continue with Languages and the impact on the numbers of Languages programs in schools
- Qualitative data from students, teachers and principals, monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation
- The impact of funding in the long term, particularly on low-SES students
- Value for money.

Student perceptions about their literacy development and language(s) practices: A Smolicz Award research project

The Smolicz Award was established in 2009 to honour the legacy of Professor Jerzy (George) Smolicz AM (1935–2006) in the areas of languages and multicultural education.

In conjunction with the Adelaide Secondary School of English (ASSOE) and the School of Languages, MELC developed a small-scale research project – ‘Student experiences and perceptions about their literacy development and language(s) practices’. Focusing on students of Syrian and Nepali backgrounds, the research project was designed to provide a foundation for considering how schools and educators can work with students from these backgrounds to strengthen their literacy development and intercultural capabilities in order to successfully engage with their learning and their school communities.

The School of Education, University of South Australia was awarded the Smolicz Award research project. The project was led by Associate Professor Sue Nichols, Associate Head of School: Research.

The research was conducted in 2019 with the ASSOE (current as well as former students who had transitioned to mainstream government high schools in metropolitan Adelaide within the previous 12 months), Salisbury High School and Woodville High School.

The outcomes of this project give some insights into the experiences and perceptions of these students in their literacy development, language(s) practices and learning needs. The report and an annotated bibliography can be found at:

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/department/research-and-statistics/conducting-research/multicultural-education-and-languages-committee-melc-research-and-projects>

The report has been disseminated to the 3 education sectors and key stakeholders and professional associations.

Discussion forums

The MELC establishes and maintains relationships with a wide range of educational and community organisations, building partnerships with them to strengthen contemporary understandings and practices in relation to linguistic and cultural diversity.

Inviting high-level speakers to discussion forums with the key stakeholders is a mechanism through which MELC seeks to advance educational discussion and debate and formulate advice to the Minister in the focal areas of education. To this end, MELC invited lead thinkers to contribute to the committee's discussions and to educational forums with key stakeholders.

During 2020, owing to COVID-19, the MELC discussion forum program was placed on hold. It is anticipated that this program will resume in 2021.

Ministerial Award for Leadership in Languages and Culture



The Ministerial Award for Leadership in Languages and Cultures is provided by MELC on behalf of the Minister. It is administered by the Australia Day Council of South Australia (ADCSA) and presented at the Australia Day Awards ceremony each year.

Nominations are received from August to November each year. Candidates must be nominated by another person or a group, such as a community organisation or school. The selection panel comprises representatives from MELC and ADCSA. An independent person may also be co-opted to the panel at the discretion of MELC and ADCSA. The award is announced and presented at a ceremony held at Government House in January each year.

The award winner adopts an ambassadorial role for MELC, with award recipients being invited to MELC meetings and MELC events.

Ms Fatima Shah and Ms Zahra Bayani joint recipients of the 2020 Award for Leadership in Languages and Cultures

Zahra arrived in Australia as a refugee originally from Afghanistan and is proficient in Dari, Hazaragi, Persian, and English. Zahra shares her story and life experiences through inspiring public speeches in multiple languages, providing deep insight into the lives of refugees and how they contribute to the Australian community. Through her storytelling she hopes to motivate and inspire youth from linguistically and culturally diverse communities to develop resilience to follow their dreams and reach their full potential. She also hopes her speeches help in developing intercultural understanding within the wider community.

Zahra is tireless in her volunteering and leadership roles in organisations such as the Australian Refugee Association, the Australian Migration Resource Centre, the Australian Red Cross, the Ariana Farsi School and the Roteract Club for Global Peace at Thebarton Secondary College.

Award winner: Fatima Shah

Fatima is an Afghan Hazara refugee who is proficient in Dari, Hazargi, Farsi, Urdu and English. She is a born leader who strives to create harmony and peace through youth and community engagement.

Fatima devotes her time and energy to helping others, both at her school, Thebarton Senior College, and in the wider community. She is an active member of the school's Youth Reference Council, a group of young leaders engaged with Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Services (STTARS), the schools' Roteract Club and governing council. Fatima co-founded a women's wellbeing group where women from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds come together and participate in activities such as yoga, dance, group discussions, and games

Review

During 2020 the committee undertook a review of the purpose, nature, value and management of the Award. The committee resolved to introduce an additional category to promote the study of languages and the development of intercultural capabilities in high school students.

Category 1: – A high school student

This award is designed to promote the study of languages and the development of intercultural capabilities. It is awarded to a high school student who has shown outstanding commitment to their study of languages and cultures at school, and who seeks to advocate for a multilingual and culturally diverse Australia by fostering engagement in linguistic and cultural diversity.

Criteria:

- sound capability in more than one language
- outstanding commitment to the study of languages and cultures
- effective intercultural capabilities
- fosters engagement in linguistic and cultural diversity within the school and/or the broader community

Category 2: A young person aged 24 years of age or under

Awarded to a young person who has demonstrated outstanding commitment to advocacy for a multilingual and culturally diverse Australia and strong community leadership.

Criteria:

- commitment to advocacy for a multilingual and culturally diverse Australia
- outstanding community leadership and effective communication skills
- sound capability in more than one language and the ability to operate successfully in linguistic and culturally diverse environments.

Appendix 1 MELC subcommittees

MELC Parent Engagement Strategy

- Associate Professor Angela Scarino – Chair
- Associate Professor Harry Savelsberg
- Ms Jasmine Millbanks
- Ms Suzanne Bradshaw, Executive Officer, MELC

Smolicz Award Research Project Management Group

- Associate Professor Angela Scarino – Chair
- Ms Anti Macri, Principal ASSOE
- Ms Lia Tedesco
- Ms Meridie Howley
- Professor John West-Sooby
- Associate Professor Susan Nichols, lead researcher
- Suzanne Bradshaw, Executive Officer, MELC

Award for Leadership in Languages and Cultures – Review

- Associate Professor Angela Scarino – Chair
- Professor John West-Sooby
- Ms Toni Cocchiaro
- Ms Meridie Howley
- Suzanne Bradshaw, Executive Officer, MELC – Chair

MELC Early Learning Strategy

- Associate Professor Angela Scarino – Chair
- Ms Jasmine Millbanks
- Suzanne Bradshaw, Executive Officer, MELC

The School of Languages Council – MELC representative

- Mr Adireddy Yara