

Report to the Curriculum Council of WA on the Identification of background candidates in the Languages Other Than English Learning Area

David Treloar

March 2003

Background on research on issue:

In January 2002, A/Professor David Treloar of the University of Western Australia was contracted by the Curriculum Council to conduct research on the issue of first and second language learning and identify implications for any future policy regarding eligibility for student enrolment in second language subjects and the identification of background speakers in TEE language subjects. (For simplicity, this report will be referred to as the *Treloar Report 2003*.)

At present there are two groups of TEE language subjects; those for which there are both first and second language syllabuses and external examinations and those for which there is only the one syllabus and external examination. Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese are in the first category. French, German, Italian and Modern Greek are in the second.

Students must receive permission to take the second language subjects of Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese. Those who are not eligible to take these, but who wish to continue with their language studies, are required to take the first language subject. (These are called Advanced subjects.)

Several syllabus committees have expressed the need for revision of our current policy to ensure that second language learners are not discouraged from taking subjects which are designed for second language learners but in which there could be significant or increasing numbers of background speakers of the language. The Curriculum Council is keen to ensure that any revised policy is fair and in line with current research, consistent and equitable across all languages. The *Treloar Report* provides a sound research base to inform its decision-making and this has been confirmed by critical reads from experts within Australia.

A public consultation forum on the *Treloar Report* was held on 25 June at which some 70 teachers representing all languages and ESL participated. Feedback from teachers and other interested people on the report is welcome and can be emailed to Robyn Smith smitr@curriculum.wa.edu.au

Report to the Curriculum Council of WA on the identification of background candidates in the *Languages Other than English* Learning Area.

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Terms of reference

I was contracted to provide my expertise in considering various particular issues surrounding the identification of background candidates in the *Languages Other than English* Learning Area, and a range of related matters.

Acknowledgment of feedback

Grateful acknowledgment is made of feedback from expert staff of the Curriculum Council.

The essence of the issues

Were it not for the great weight of findings that the acquisition of a first language in infancy is vastly different in nature from the acquisition through cognitive efforts, whether early or late in life, of knowledge, skills and understandings in the learning areas of all other Curriculum Council subjects, including second languages, there would be no case for the Council having either interest or concern about "background candidates" in languages.

Were it not for those findings, a student speaking a language from infancy would not need to be identified as "different" from a student coming to the formal study of the language for the first time at any stage of their education.

There would be no more purpose in differentiating between those students than there is in differentiating between a student brought up in a musical family and playing music from infancy and one beginning the study and performance of music in high school¹; or between the average student and one whose parents are professors of mathematics who have talked and done mathematics with the student from an early age. The Council currently sees no need whatsoever in drawing those sorts of distinctions, despite the obvious advantages of such early exposure. They are nothing more than examples of the payoff from devoting more time and resources to the achievement of a student's potential, or from enthusiasm, or from the interplay between time on task and the genetic determinants of ability in those areas.

Implications for the methodology of the report

Therefore it was decided to address first the well-researched topic of language acquisition.

The following general parts of this report, which briefly survey these issues of language acquisition, were written, as it were from first principles, before the particular nominated issues were addressed. This was done deliberately in an attempt to ensure that the appropriate principles carried full weight, and in an attempt to ensure that there was no possibility that the report was either excessively reactive to the nominated issues or excessively defensive of the Curriculum Council's present practices.

The references that are given are not necessarily the most seminal or the most recent, but all are readily available in Perth, mostly in the libraries of The University of Western Australia.

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¹ A 2002 web site reports that "Australian scientists say they have directly pinpointed the part of the brain responsible for perfect pitch in musicians – although it's still too early to say if this musical skill is a gift we inherit or acquire." Presumably it is also too early to say whether, if acquired, there is a critical period in which to acquire it.

Research on language acquisition

"Acquisition of language" has for many decades been intensely researched. Any policy, and any report, on issues related to the acquisition of a first language (L1) or the acquisition of a second language (L2) should be informed by the findings of that research.

Notwithstanding the vastness of the research, it cannot be said that there is unanimity of conclusions among the world leaders of the various strands of the research. In part this ongoing range of interpretations reflects the very essence of any research in a busy area, as it offers new hypotheses, and puts old and new hypotheses to new tests, all within established disciplines studying language acquisition. In part the diversity of interpretations reflects the emergence over recent years of altogether new research opportunities related to language acquisition, such as those offered in the burgeoning disciplines of neuroscience and cognitive science.

Therefore the writing of this report faces a substantial challenge. It would be inappropriate for this report to attempt to be the last word in expert summaries of the state and findings of worldwide research. The place for that would be in a refereed international journal, the author for that would be a recognised world-leader, and it would consist of as many lines of citations as of summary. Indeed, such summaries have been published from time to time, and they offer different emphases depending it seems on the disciplines favoured by the journal and the background of the expert summariser. On the other hand it also would be inappropriate for this report to be highly superficial in its recognition of the research or excessively partial in its sampling from it.

What appears to be needed is a brief acknowledgment of such major findings as seem most likely to be relevant to the Curriculum Council's position and to the detail of the particular issues. This will be attempted with minimal formal referencing. The local university libraries have hundreds of post-1990 texts and journals that can be consulted².

Definitions and terminology

This report develops and proposes the following working definitions, based on a wide range of findings that acquisition of a first language during an early critical period is fundamentally different from acquisition of a second language later in life, whereas acquisition of such a second language later in life involves cognitive processes similar to those involved in mastering other disciplines later in life.

Definitions are a necessary starting point in the consideration of the Council's current stance and of the particular issues. Therefore the definitions are set out here, even though the argument for them appears later, to establish the key terminology.

The report itself points to difficulties with these definitions, and comments on alternatives.

Definition of L1:

A person's first language (L1) is defined as a language acquired from infancy, in circumstances offering wide opportunities for exchanges with other children and for learning from the speech of adults in that language. It is possible for an individual to have two or more first languages meeting that definition. Such individuals are defined here as "bilingual".

² In places this report draws on an order of argument and on some of the recent findings referred to in *Language Acquisition* Steven Pinker, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, being a Chapter to appear in L. R. Gleitman, M. Liberman, and D. N. Osherson (Eds.), *An Invitation to Cognitive Science, 2nd Ed. Volume 1: Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. available at the time of writing at <http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/~harnad/Papers/Py104/pinker.langacq.html>

Although not essential for many of the conclusions of this report, L1 may also be a language of instruction and communication in primary schooling.

Definition of L2:

A person's second language (L2) is defined by not being their L1. Thus, L2 can be acquired by later-than-infancy immersion in a L2 culture, or acquired by later classroom teaching in the L1 culture unsupported by fluent exchanges with other children and unsupported by hearing the native speech of adults, or acquired in other ways.

Under the definitions some children born and reared in Australia could be bilingual, that is, have two first languages, one being English. This would require substantially more than having parents who speak a language other than English at home, specifically requiring in the pre-school years "wide opportunities for exchanges with other children and for learning from the speech of adults in that language". It could occur with Chinese, Aboriginal, Arabic or some other language, in situations where the child freely communicates in both English and that other language, enabled to do so by a "community" that speaks that other language. There would not necessarily have to have been formal pre-school tuition in either English or that other language. This seems analogous to the manner in which many children in Switzerland, Quebec, India, the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, and many other places acquired two or more first languages.

Equally, for a child born and reared in Australia English might be L2, for example for an Aboriginal child born and reared through the critical period in a remote Aboriginal community.

Both definitions relate to some specific person.

The foregoing definitions are "input-based", concentrating on what language was available and used in pre-school years.

An alternative outcomes-related definition could be that a first language is any language in which the person has reached some particular level(s) of fluency or competence by the end of the critical period. Depending on the tests to be used, and depending on the experts designing the tests, such tests might be administered between seven years of age and the end of primary education.

Neither definition need cover all the dimensions of language, which can be separated out in many different ways, but here might be thought of as the syntactic, phonological, orthographic, semantic, pragmatic, and discourse dimensions. It is relevant to any definition of L1 to observe that in many cultures seven-year olds have little competence in orthography³. Also, when referring to competence in the phonological dimension, it is debatable that any particular pronunciation, or accent, should be privileged in the definition. Accent, though marking a person as coming from a particular class, region, or other-language background, and therefore carrying substantial advantages and disadvantages, is of little importance as a "competency" for most people, so long as it does not impede understanding by the typical recipient in that culture. Witness the acceptably understandable English accents of the many current World Cup cricket commentators and the acceptable L2 English of film actors from Maurice Chevalier through Arnold Schwarzenegger to Salma Hayek.

Incidentally, it is a common research finding that most persons coming to an L2 as a high-school student or adult never master its phonology to the level of being indistinguishable in any culture in which the

³ In Germany some third of students entering first grade know very few letters and have no reading skills at all [Mayringer, Wimmer & Landerl *Phonological skills and literacy acquisition in German* in Reitsma, P. & Verhoeven, L (eds). *Problems and Interventions in Literacy development*. Kluwer. 1998]. This situation, though remarkably different to that in some other cultures, does not negate the proposition that all these first grade children are already "L1: German" if they have been acquiring their German from birth in circumstances offering wide opportunities for exchanges in German. Thus for some children entering school in Germany, maybe in immigrant communities, German may not be L1.

language is at home. Without immersion in that culture they carry a "foreign accent" for the rest of their lives. This foreign accent solidifies into having fixed patterns of "error" or more politely "difference" that later efforts of remedial teaching and correction can scarcely undo.

It is a source of confusion to some, though its sense should follow from arguments in this report, that on the one hand a prime criterion for identifying the L1 student is likely to be their accent (judged by an expert knowing the various accents in that language)⁴; yet on the other hand it is accent (an aspect of phonology), of all the dimensions of the language, that is perhaps the least important when it comes to rating/grading L2 students on outcome scales. In particular, a strong argument can be raised against rating/grading L2 students on the same pronunciation scale as L1 students in Curriculum Council courses and subjects. Comprehensibility to an L1 speaker is what is required, and many accents do not inhibit comprehensibility.

These definitions, though arising from research findings, lead to difficulties in research and illustrate the difficulties in interpreting some research findings. For example the vast majority of infant learners of the first language of a culture do have wide opportunities for exchanges with other children and wide opportunities for learning from the speech of adults in that language, making it extraordinarily unlikely that statistical research methods applied to large samples will enable discernment as to the extents to which each of those three circumstances, whether we call them definitional requirements or culturally associated factors, is functionally essential or is the most important. It is partly for that reason that the definition requires all three circumstances.

It is perhaps only in the most recent years that what might be called "micro-research" has enabled a more detailed teasing out of these three dimensions of the definition, and of the manner in which language is acquired, through examining the development, structure and function of the infant brain.

The research has found, in what seems to be the majority view, that particular areas of the brain support the learning of L1. In a bilingual person, with two L1s, the same brain areas support both languages, suggesting very strongly that similar processes support both of the L1 languages. In contrast for an L2, learned later in life, different brain areas support L1 and L2, suggesting that different processes support acquisition of L1 and L2.

Some indications from research

Almost every child learns their L1 successfully in a few years without formal lessons, and therefore without the need for formal teaching. By "successfully" is meant to a level providing mutual comprehensibility at the time and enabling easy transition to higher levels of native speaking. In Australia, in everyday terms, "successfully" is seen in the command of English demonstrated by most children quite early in primary school. In general it equates to a level equivalent in mastery to that associated with a great deal of formal teaching and learning on the part of a high-school L2 student. By "learns their L1" can be meant a variety of things, depending on which expert is consulted. This report suggests that "learns their L1" means only the dimensions of L1 that very young children acquire, namely those related to "speech", but "speech" includes rules of grammar and other dimensions, as explained later.

There is some, though incomplete, knowledge of the neurophysiological and behavioural mechanisms through which this early acquisition is achieved, such that almost all cognitive scientists believe that children who learn different L1s do not conceptualise the world in different ways. According to those scientists, language acquisition is not learning to think, so learning L2 is not learning to think in a different way from the way you thought when you had only L1.

Virtually all humans talk but no other species do, and people vary in their command over language, even given identical opportunity, so genetics in general and heredity at the personal level must be involved in

⁴ "Background" speakers are identified by the Curriculum Council in part through the "interview" that forms part of the external assessment. Presumably accent is a chief criterion, in line with this research.

enabling language acquisition in general and in affecting a particular individual's relative competence with language beyond the critical period. But a child growing up in Japan in circumstances meeting the L1 definition for Japanese will speak Japanese whereas the same child if brought up in English-speaking L1 circumstances in Perth would have spoken English, so the environment is the determinant of which language is acquired.

In the 1950's Chomsky argued that because children learn L1 without explicit instruction or any other environmental clues as to the nature of any theoretical principles by which language may be learned, L1 language acquisition depends on some cognitive "module" (in the brain) that every child has and that therefore must be independent from general intelligence. Support for Chomsky's proposal has come from much more recent research indicating that humans evolved brain circuitry, mostly in the left hemisphere, specifically designed for language, that is anatomically separate from the circuitry related to general intelligence. This finding has been further reinforced by studies of children with specific disabilities, which showed that language development does not depend on having fully-functioning general intelligence nor, it follows, on the level of general intelligence.

For some decades it was a predominant view that there is a "window of opportunity", measured in years of age, in which language acquisition to "native fluency" is especially favoured. This "critical-period" stance⁵ had empirical support from research with humans and support by analogy with findings with respect to birds' acquisition of birdsongs. These findings for birds were very influential and arose from experiments in which eggs were isolated and the chicks raised in isolation. Tapes of male song for that species were played to the young birds, but at different ages for different birds. If the species has a critical period, then playing the tapes too early or too late would be ineffective in enabling the birds to reproduce the song. In general that was the finding. Unfortunately for the critical-period stance and despite some usefulness of arguments based on cross-species evolutionary evidence, argument by analogy is ultimately unconvincing on its own. The critical period view headed into a period of criticism. However, some critical-period phenomena in human development have received repeated support from well-controlled research among humans, notably "squinting" whereby if full binocular vision is not achieved within three years squinting will always be likely due to lack of binocularly-driven cells necessary to binocular vision, and (of direct interest to this report) "phonemic discrimination" at around 12 months of age, and "learning human language" for which the critical period does not extend beyond age 10 or so. This latter finding, which is referring mainly to acquiring some L1 rather than not acquiring any L1, should not be used for gross extrapolation to the local issues. But it does mean that there is a real change in facility of language learning some time at or before adolescence.

Because the "critical period" notion is central to much of what follows, and now again seems to be on the ascendant, it is worthy of some further elaboration.

The evidence seems to be that, although both hemispheres of the brain are in many respects equal in potential and function at birth, the function of language gradually isolates into the left hemisphere of the brain, such that the brain is said to lose its "plasticity"⁶, or have severely reduced plasticity, after the critical period. Adults who have suffered brain damage in their left hemisphere fail to recover their

⁵ Notably associated with this view was Michael Long, one-time Professor of Applied Linguistics at UWA [*Maturational constraints on language development* Studies in Second Language Acquisition 12, 251-85, 1983] Balanced summaries of the evidence for the critical period hypothesis and the doubts about it were given by Rod Ellis, currently professor in the Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics, the University of Auckland. [*The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1994. *Second Language Acquisition* (In 'Oxford Introductions to Linguistics'). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1997.] and in Judith R Strotzer *Language acquisition after puberty* Georgetown Uni Press. 1994, as well as by many others. Strotzer goes so far as to conclude that "full command of a language is only attainable in the course of brain maturation (roughly during childhood)".

⁶ Plasticity in this example is roughly the ability of one part of the brain to take over functions normally controlled by another part, like any part of a lump of plasticine could be used to fashion the arm of a sculpture. Slightly more correctly it is the ability of the brain to change its shape, size and local function depending on a person's genes and their early environmental experiences.

language if they don't recover in about five months, but young children show an ability to recover over a longer period, and have sometimes made a full recovery if they were very young at the time of damage. Even total removal of the left hemisphere did not preclude young children's reacquisition of language.

Ellis⁷ posed the following key questions in his textbook.

1. What effect does age have on the rate of L2 learning?
2. What effect does age have on learners' levels of L2 achievement of native-speaker levels of proficiency?
3. What effect does age have on learners' levels of L2 achievement (in those learners who do not reach native-speaker proficiency)?
4. What effect does age have on the processes of L2 learning?

Ellis also said, "if adults substitute inductive cognitive learning strategies for the language acquisition device used by children, differences in the process of acquisition might be expected to occur".

Those are the sorts of implications that have to be queried for any system of language teaching and learning, and even more particularly for any system of language assessment and rewards for achievement.

The critical-period stance maintains that "age", in the sense of whether or not acquisition of the language took place in the critical period as opposed to after the critical period, does indeed have a profound effect, to the extent of determining whether for the particular individual the target language is an L2 or actually an L1, and that the differences between the manner of acquisition of some dimensions of L1 and L2 are also so profound that they are completely different phenomena.

More recently there have been well-regarded findings⁸ casting some doubt on the critical-period stance. However, many of the survey findings contrary to the critical-period hypothesis appear to have involved very small samples and to have arisen from situations in which the target language was the language in which the L2 learners were immersed (equivalent to ESL learners in Perth). These circumstances reduce their relevance to the WA situation under review, in which second-language learners of German, Japanese etc. are learning in an English-speaking environment.

Thus behind the evidence there is potential confusion between the possible "age effect" and the very evident "time-on-task" and "immersion" effects. Ellis regularly pointed out in his earlier writings that learning environments that are restricted to the formal classroom, say for German L2 in Perth, do not provide learners with the amount of exposure needed even for the emergence of young learners' age advantage, let alone the opportunity for older children to compensate for their being beyond the critical period⁹.

Most of these arguments or points of view in favour of the critical period do not go to the extent of claiming that no child beginning to learn L2 after the critical period, or no adult, can reach the competencies of the genuine L1 learner whose major learning was in the critical period. Indeed it seems that some individuals can, in some cases due to phenomenal ability, in some cases due to long and deep immersion.

⁷ Ellis 1994

⁸ For example in Singleton, D. & Lengyel, Z. 1995 *The age factor in second language acquisition*. Multilingual Matters. Adelaide.

⁹ I have heard it argued that as LOTE is now compulsory in WA from Years 3 - 10 the local education system has indeed captured the window of opportunity or critical period. However I have also heard that over those years a child's exposure to LOTE amounts to not much more than 50 hours. Even if it were more than double those hours, the exposure would not have captured the critical period because most of it is outside that period, because the cultural environment does not provide the other necessary features of the definition of L1 and because the amount of time is too slight.

Also, the various different dimensions of language (see earlier list) have different extents of association with the critical period. There is evidence, for example, that adults learn formal grammar faster than young children do. On the other hand the evidence for the critical period is strongest for pronunciation.

Whether the critical period is related solely to neurophysiology and anatomy is debatable. Many of the apparently divergent findings of research seem to be that some researchers controlled for different other factors, and that some disregarded the effect of the typical L1 learning environment (called by some the "natural" environment). In that environment of immersion child learners play with other L1-speaking young children, enjoy their language interaction, can ask anytime and anywhere, and do not have to worry about making mistakes. Older L2 learners, on the other hand, have difficulties in participating in natural language interaction, and they may be in non-naturalistic learning situations ["memorise the declension of these German verbs by next Monday"]. However, older learners can use more mature cognitive skills and may thereby move relatively rapidly up an outcome-scale for grammar.

The indisputable fact is that most older L2 learners fail to reach the native-speaker's level, especially in pronunciation. It is not necessarily that they cannot auditorily recognise the differences between their pronunciation and native pronunciation when the two are presented to them, but they cannot reliably and regularly articulate the native pronunciation fluently in speech.

It is therefore in respect to pronunciation that it would be the most inequitable to have Western Australian L2 learners of German "competing against" students for whom German is L1.

It is also therefore likely that pronunciation would be especially useful in distinguishing a German L1 student from a German L2 student, taking into account that there is a range of accents that would count as German and could have been acquired in a L1 situation (from various parts of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, etc.) just as there would be an even greater range for Spanish (including the various South American accents) and French (Canadian, the various African) or indeed English (Canadian, USA, Australian, various regions of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, etc.).

The difficulty of separating the neurophysiological aspects of any critical period from the environmental aspects leads some authors to propose that older learners interpret sounds in a target L2 in terms of sounds found in their L1 and that this effect of L1 may be a more important cause of "foreign accent" than any limitation on phonetic learning imposed by neurophysiological maturation.

In general the critical-period hypothesis has survived. Evidence for it is strongest for pronunciation, but there is some associated evidence for "listening to and understanding the standard accent of the community".

There is also evidence for "understanding of grammar". In one set of findings, those who acquired the language before the age of 8 years had native speaker judgments about grammar, but scores on that judgement declined steadily for subsequent ages of acquisition¹⁰.

Also, if teachers and learners both accept the idea of the critical period, they should not stick to the view that only one standard pronunciation is essential for the development of communicative skills, though aspirations towards it are not necessarily less than desirable.

Fuller explanations of evidence for the critical period hypothesis, and criticisms of it, can be found in the literature. In everyday or common-sense terms the conclusion is stated as follows. "...all normal children are totally successful at acquiring the language or languages of their communities, while most adults who try do not succeed in developing a native mastery of a single foreign language."¹¹

¹⁰ Jacqueline S. Johnson and Elissa L. Newport *Critical Period Effects in Second Language Learning: The Influence of Maturation on the Acquisition of English as a Second Language*. in *Readings in Second Language Acquisition* edited by H. Douglas Brown and Susan T. Gonzo (Eds.). 1994.

¹¹ Strotzer, op. cit. p. 130

Reiteration of the preferred definitions and terminology

It is clear from the research findings that there are three separate factors to be considered in determining who is a L1-learner and who is a L2-learner, and in determining what the advantages of one over the other might be. The factors are the following.

- Span of age over which the language is first acquired
- Nature of the learning environment, in particular whether it is L1-speaking or L2-speaking
- Time spent on the task of learning the language

The most favoured learner is the L1-learner who first acquires the target language in the critical period from birth to adolescence, immersed in a culture speaking the target language, and thus spending a vast preponderance of time in infant years acquiring the language.

Thus, as stated earlier, the preferred terminology and definition of an L1 is as follows.

A first language (L1) is defined as a language acquired from infancy, in circumstances offering wide opportunities for exchanges with other children and for learning from the speech of adults in that language. It is possible for an individual to have two or more first languages meeting that definition. They are defined here as "bilingual".

Although not essential for the conclusions of this report, L1 may also be a language of instruction and communication in primary schooling.

In the extreme case, the learner has no alternative but to communicate in the target language throughout the critical period. Motivation with L1 comes from its basic essentiality for living. Support is provided automatically by the culture.

Towards the other end of the spectrum of opportunity from the L1-learner is the typical WA L2-learner of recent years, who first encounters the target language on entering high school, after the critical period has decayed, who has no access to everyday speech in the target language, and whose time devoted to the language is nothing more than the timetabled school periods and the time spent on homework.

Thus this report suggests the following terminology and definition of a L2.

A second language (L2) is defined by not being L1. Thus, L2 can be acquired by later-than-infancy immersion in a L2 culture, or by later classroom teaching in the L1 culture unsupported by fluent exchanges with other children and unsupported by hearing the native speech of adults, or acquired in other intermediate ways.

Motivation with L2 in general is not an external imperative, as is the case with L1, but most commonly internal, and as such is severely threatened by anxieties, lack of need in communications with others, perceptions of incompetence, and indifference on the part of peers and parents. In instances of compulsory enrolment motivation may be nothing more than the necessity to "pass" for certification.

How to tell who is an L1 student and who is a L2 student. Who is a "native speaker" or "background speaker"?

This section will conclude with the recommendation that within the Curriculum Council system it is necessary for fairness to have answers to these questions; that they should be answers that use explicit criteria to arrive at Yes/No decisions; and that the criteria should be closely related to the foregoing definitions of L1 and L2.

However, it also will also be clear that no answers and no criteria can have universal appeal or universal applicability or be in any sense perfect or devoid of possible inequity. The answers and the criteria must

be those most appropriate to the particular circumstances in WA at this time, and to the particular Curriculum Council policies and practices to which the answer and criteria will be applied.

This report has proposed definitions of the term "native speaker" or "background speaker", or "L1" for an individual, which is the same thing. It so happens that those definitions are akin to Chomsky's early concept of an "ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogenous speech community"¹²

However, sensitive questions are posed by such definitions.

The first question is "a native speaker of what?" Presumably because "language" and "dialect" and "accent" are ill-defined and contentious, Chomsky moved emphasis to "speech community", which though avoiding words for which everybody had their own firm meaning, substituted what later writers came to see as an equally-undefined term.

As a local example of the problems of definition, if a local student born in Singapore is said to be "a native speaker of English", are we referring to Royal Family English, American English or Singapore English? If the last-mentioned may be doubted to exist, do we mean something that we might call Standard Singapore English or something we might call Vernacular Singapore English? Or are all of those Englishes explicitly accepted by the Curriculum Council as types of the one English that is examined and rewarded and privileged in the TEE English curriculum, and therefore not discriminated between or against in those examinations? As an aside, can that same student also be regarded as a native speaker of Cantonese, and if so, is Cantonese a language or a dialect of "Chinese", such that the student is classified by the Curriculum Council as a "background speaker of Mandarin Chinese"?

Those examples emphasise that languages are exceedingly sensitive to define. Their definition takes on such a "political" dimension that Heinrich once said "a language is a dialect with its own army and navy" and a more recent author amended this to something like "a language is a dialect with its own television programmes"

In practice when deciding whether various dialects are really the same language one might have to use a criterion of high mutual intelligibility, though that criterion is generally more related to speaking and listening than to writing. According to that criterion all the various regional UK English accents heard on "The Bill", all the more regularly heard USA and Canadian accents, and all the accents of English as an L1 in Australia are the same English language. The spoken "English" of some West Indians may not be, and may therefore be classified as another language.

However, to an extent it is found with many languages that even extreme dialectical differences in the spoken language, and hence in the comprehensibility of listening to it, are associated with relative uniformity in the writing of it. Therefore defining what is a language, and hence who is a native speaker of it, solely on the speaking of it, when the teaching and learning of it may be predominantly occupied with reading and writing, might be far from appropriate.

It certainly does not pay to dwell too much here on accents. In the teaching of English in WA as L1, scarcely any emphasis is laid on accent; it presumably being assumed that the students, whether of local or overseas origin, will be forced by external motivation to adopt an accent that is locally understandable. In L1 English accent and pronunciation are not examined in high school. It follows that in the teaching of the various L2s in WA very little emphasis should be placed on accent, beyond the bounds of mutual intelligibility. If the curriculum gave more emphasis on pronunciation of L2 than the local culture gives to the pronunciation of its own L1, it would indeed be over-privileging the L2, and in particular over-privileging some particular dialect such as the French approved by the Académie Française.

¹² Chomsky, N. (1965) *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. p.3

As remarked above, most sociolinguists use the notion of the "speech community" but that notion may be no less complex than the notions of "language" and "dialect", especially if definition of a language in social terms includes speaking the language! Such a definition would be circular and useless.

One way of seeming to avoid the trap of using the term "native speaker" is to speak of "native speaker competence" but that is another circular definition that takes the user around and back to "the ability to conform to the set of linguistic and sociolinguistic expectations of a particular speech community".

The second problem is that communicative competence, say in English, is not a matter of getting prescribed levels on every English outcome-scale. On some scales "non-natives", such as immigrants, may actually be more competent than "natives"¹³. A local English-speaker who said "Them reffos don't speak English proper" might be demonstrating both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence for their Perth suburb, but according to Curriculum Council descriptors of levels on outcome-scales might have a far lower level on a Spoken English or an English Grammar scale than a refugee who had learned English as L2 in a Middle Eastern community, but spoke with a noticeably non-Australian accent.

Overall, policy and decisions are going to have to depend not only on the definitions of L1 and L2, but also (if we shift to the prospective "outcomes" terminology) on relatively precise definitions of what is meant by the "target language"¹⁴, and relatively precise specifications of the outcome-strand-scales such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and of the levels on those scales. These are, as the Council knows, not trivial questions. There have been complainants in the past who have claimed that their L1 regional Italian has been a hindrance in their learning of TEE Italian because their regional pronunciation, and to an extent vocabulary, is virtually impossible to eradicate, but is not accepted as "correct" by the examiners¹⁵.

This report therefore has come to the conclusion that any definition of "native speakers" or "background speakers" ideally must first define what is meant by the target language, in terms of outcome-scales and/or grade-related descriptors that set down the dimensions of competence in some detail. Second, the critical-period stance must be accepted and used to assess whether the student in question acquired the target language "from infancy, in circumstances offering wide opportunities for exchanges with other children and for learning from the speech of adults in that language" - or according to some similar written criterion.

Given the potential litigation on such definitions, it would be ideal if the definition were transparent, defensible, valid, reliable and fair - indeed met all the Curriculum Council's desiderata for assessment, and more. The student's language would either be the target language or it would not, and the student would either have that target language as L1 or would not. Unfortunately these ideals are elusive.

Perhaps even more unfortunately it would be even more unfair to abandon the effort than to install some practical compromise.

This is because the L1 student in an L2 subject has a huge advantage over the genuine L2 student, especially in the local schooling situation in which the latter's exposure to the language is confined to class and solitary homework.

¹³ The notion of any homogenous "native" English (or any other language) within broad communities, or of typical low-variance performance by "native speakers" on any scale of interest is extensively critiqued in Tim McNamara *Measuring Second Language Performance*. Longman. 1996.

¹⁴ e.g. is the target language French as defined by the Académie Française; or is it some standard variety of formal written French as defined in the set texts, specifically excluding various vernaculars and slang, plus spoken French of a universal sort that welcomes and embraces all varieties of the French spoken as L1 in France (including Corsica) Canada, Mauritius and so on?

¹⁵ As remarked elsewhere such a practice would seem very strange, inasmuch as an Italian accent, or any other accent, in English is not held against the student in the English curriculum unless it significantly hinders comprehension when it might lead to correction, but even then seems not to figure in marking rubrics.

Therefore the Curriculum Council should consider itself obliged to say, "For the purposes of assessment in target language X the term 'background speaker' is defined as meaning Y". Because the background speaker of a grammarian might be different from the background speaker of the sociolinguist, which in turn might be different from the background speaker of the phonologist, the Curriculum Council's definition should be based on criteria that can be transparently seen to reflect the explicit outcome-scales or grade-related descriptors or objectives and texts for the course, depending on the style of curriculum.

The result for the individual student will always, unavoidably, be a matter of probabilities of the two sorts of error - the first being the error of classifying a student as L1 when their balance of advantages in their background, in terms of their likelihood of getting any particular advantageous level or grade given their general intelligence, really was not significantly greater than that of the "control" type of L2 student - the second being the error of classifying a student as L2 when their balance of advantages in their background, in terms of their likelihood of getting any particular advantageous level or grade given their general intelligence, really was significantly greater than that of the "control" type of L2 student and more like that of a typical L1 student.

The question naturally arises as to whether L1 students can be distinguished from L2 students by administering a test for competencies.

If, as suggested in this report, the distinction is to be made for as many as possible just after the end of the critical period, such a test might be efficient. At that stage the L1 students would have substantially distinct and higher competencies, with little overlap¹⁶.

As the years pass beyond the critical period, diligent and gifted L2 students move towards the levels of less able L1 students, in some dimensions more than others. In some dimensions there develops a less clear bimodality to distinguish the L1 from the L2.

Such a test would require very expert design and interpretation.

Ultimately, because for their L1 almost all normal children achieve, before they even reach primary school, levels of Speaking, Phonology (pronunciation), Listening and Grammar equivalent in description to what in the future outcomes-based parlance will be described as, say, Level 5 for L2 students, the identification of an L1 student is best based on recognising in the very young L1 student these sorts of levels. That is, the L1 student is best identified by testing for levels around the end of the critical period, certainly before they have commenced the sort of post-compulsory schooling offered in L2 courses in WA. Testing for L1 Orthography, Vocabulary etc. could occur early in their teens.

Therefore it would be ideal if the Curriculum Council could collaborate with the school systems in setting up tests for L1 in the primary school years.

Because not all students would be captured in the net of such tests, the Council could not avoid using other tests in year 11 and/or year 12.

The advantages of being an L1 student in a course designed for L2 students and assessed on the assumption that all the students are L2

It may seem unnecessary to extensively spell out these substantial advantages, given preceding discussion of what it is to be L1 compared to what it is to be L2, and assuming the critical-period stance. The advantages are potentially immense.

At the most obvious and extreme, an L1 student entering such a course in any year of high school where all the other students are encountering the language for the first time is likely to already be at levels on all relevant outcome-scales that the other students could aspire to only after years of study, if at all.

¹⁶ McNamara *op.cit.* pp. 186 *et seq.* provides some discussion.

This will be true even for outcome-scales relating to dimensions of language in which the older learner seems to be at no disadvantage compared to the infant learner, in terms of potential rate of progress. For example, there seems to be no evidence that the ability to learn the spelling of additional words and the recognising of these additional words on the page declines after some critical period, in contrast to the evidence for phonology and grammar. However the L1 student in the example already will know thousands of words as a mental vocabulary before entering the course, compared to the L2 student's zero or very few.

Grammar was just mentioned, and this report previously had given grammar little attention. Grammar is learned very early in life by the L1 learner, where "learned" means correct observance of its rules in practice as distinct from explicit knowing of what the rules are and being able to state the rules. Most three-to-five year olds obey most grammatical rules of their L1 (and indeed their L1s-plural if they are bilingual) most of the time. This is true, for example, for the grammatical rules of gender, which the L2 student in our example, being assumed to have English - an almost gender-free language - as L1, commonly finds quite difficult. Infants acquiring French, German, Hebrew etc. acquire "gender marking" very early in life and make very few errors by the end of their pre-school years.

Orthography is a special case of advantage with ideographic languages such as Chinese and Japanese. For example it is commonly found that Japanese and Chinese characters are far more difficult for the English L1 student to learn as an L2 than the writing systems of French and German, which are essentially highly similar to the English system with added accents and diacritics. For many reasons that have been regularly elucidated by linguists the learning of the Chinese or Japanese characters is a great burden on the memory of adolescent L2 students. Even the very perception of difficulty hinders attitude amongst L2 learners of Chinese and Japanese, whereas in the L1 situation the characters unavoidably have to be learned. Even though this may be done through drills, rote learning and mnemonics, which are far removed from the mental and behavioural processes typifying any "critical period", it is a general fact that an average L1 Chinese student learns a great number of Chinese characters by a young age.

It is worth mentioning a few round numbers to illustrate the magnitude of the difference. These numbers come from various published sources but should not be interpreted too literally. Where it is said that some specific number of characters are known, that includes knowing the arrangement of those characters into what we might call "words". An L1 Chinese student in China learns as many as 600 characters per year of schooling until, at the end of six years of schooling, many have mastered well over 3,500 of a total of some 50,000. Some 1,000 are said to be the minimum necessary to be basically literate, and about 2,000 are said to be needed for what might be called "general literacy" such as comfortably reading daily local newspapers. Even at the university level in Australia, some multimedia packages are constrained to the ambition of mastery of some 500 common characters in a first-year unit. The current Year 12 Chinese Second Language syllabus shows some 500 characters "as a guide to the range of characters which Year 12 students should be able to recognise and reproduce. Students should be familiar with additional characters related to the topics studied". Elsewhere in the world there is evidence that high-school students of L2 Chinese seem able to learn at the same rate of 600 characters per annum that are learned per annum by Chinese L1 children, generally through the devotion of more time than is assumed available in WA, but whether recognising and reproducing 500, 600 or even 1000 characters is chosen as describing Level 7 for Chinese as L2 in the new outcomes system, there are clear issues of inequity if an L1 student already knowing 3500 characters competes for an award or a mark directly against an L2 student struggling to get to their first 500, 600 or 1000.

In contrast to the likely statistical independence of early-childhood L1 acquisition from general intelligence, the evidence about L2 acquisition after the critical period seems to be that the trait that can be statistically discerned as separable and which therefore may be termed "L2 acquisition" or "L2 proficiency" is statistically related to general cognitive abilities. Judging from one thorough study of ESL studied by Japanese students visiting UCLA¹⁷, the general cognitive abilities most relevant to L2

¹⁷ Miyuki Sasaki *Second language proficiency, foreign language aptitude, and intelligence* Lang, 1996

acquisition seem to be "verbal intelligence" and "reasoning" and there is an even more general overarching cognitive factor that could be related to an ability called "utilising great amounts of new information". Many earlier studies had found that the first two of these three abilities or traits had a measurable heritability for a given population and culture, and each develops and changes with age. Each cognitive ability may be thought of as a ceiling on achievement potential. Education may be thought of as better enabling each individual to reach their potential. In a "factor analysis" sense, most factors such as these two are statistically dominated by the single highest-level factor arbitrarily called "general intelligence".

Collecting together the rather contrasting conclusions for L1 and L2 leads to the hypothesis that correlations between L2 marks (of genuine L2 students) and marks in other TEE subjects will be of moderate scale (not as high as between more cognate subjects, especially those not involving verbal intelligence). However, marks of L1 students in L2 subjects will be dominated by their early-childhood acquisition of L1 and also will tend to clustered in the upper range of marks (compared to the genuine L2 students). For both reasons, these marks of L1 students in L2 subjects will be much less correlated with their marks in other subjects, possibly to the extent of failing any statistical test of whether they could be reliably brought together onto the same scale. It could be worth the Curriculum Council testing this hypothesis¹⁸.

Background speakers and scaling

Background speakers (taken for the moment to be equivalent to those for whom the target language is L1 using the definition in this report) are permitted to enrol in German, French and Italian, alongside those for whom it is L2.

Currently, there is no disadvantage in the scaling process arising from being classified as a background speaker in those languages.

The background speakers are removed from the population of students in the production of the "scaling population".

The marks for that scaling population are then scaled along with all the marks in all the other subjects, using the current algorithm.

Therefore these scaling procedures seem to be satisfactorily fair and valid for the non-background speakers, taken in isolation, being identical to the procedures used in other subjects.

However, it seems that the background speakers are substantially advantaged by this current system, not just with respect to the non-background speakers, but with respect to all other candidates in all subjects. This occurs through the later calculation of scaled marks for those background speakers by using the transformation that had been derived for the non-background speakers. For example a background speaker with an unscaled mark of 85 gets the same scaled mark as that obtained by a non-background speaker with a mark of 85. As should be clear from many points made in this report, a mark of 85 achieved by a background speaker might reflect little more than what they were capable of achieving in primary school or even earlier (for phonology and vocabulary) in the process of their acquiring the language as L1. As such it makes a highly inequitably great contribution to a TES that is supposed to be a predictor of the likelihood of success in any university course, and supposed to be a sum over all subjects that gives equal weight to all those subjects in some way that adjusts for their differences in difficulty. The background speaker, for whom getting 85 is far easier than it is for a non-background speaker¹⁹, is gaining a substantial unearned boost to their TES.

¹⁸ The universities' admissions offices have seen examples every year of "background" students with marks in L2 subjects remarkably higher than any of their other marks.

¹⁹ Or putting it another way, for the background speaker a mark of 85 is as difficult as a mark of say 45 is for a non-background speaker.

It would seem that the only way of avoiding the worst of this bias, would be for the Council to consider prohibiting students for whom the language is L1 from participating in a course/subject that is designed as L2. Alternatively the marks of the background speakers could be scaled separately.

The case of students who enter Year 11 with high achievement in the target language but are not classifiable as L1

Because this report recommends that any definition of L1 be predominantly based on the critical-period stance, it is highly important to make clear the many ways in which a student may achieve high levels of attainment in a target language before year 11, without the language having been L1, and outside the time and resourcing offered by the WA schooling system: in other words by various form of personal effort.

Such ways include the following²⁰.

- studying in a country in which the target language is the L1 for the community, well after the critical period has passed, say in years 8-10 of secondary education;
- having parents for whom the target language is L1, or who are teachers of the target language, and who offer extra tuition and conversational opportunities at home;
- attending extracurricular religious school or community school in Australia after the critical period and thereby achieving higher levels in Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese, Japanese, Greek, etc.

This report suggests that there are no reasons for the Curriculum Council treating such students any differently from other L2 students, in cases where the target language was not L1 due to attainments during the critical period.

Comments on some elements of a current syllabus (Chinese: Second Language)

The quotations in italics are from the Curriculum Council website of 2003.

"This syllabus responds to new trends in language teaching/learning which stress communication as the purpose of language learning."

Given the emphasis that this report recommends should be placed on the acquisition of intelligible communication when determining who has Chinese as L1 and for whom it is L2, this stress on communication looks thoroughly admirable, if it forms the basis of determining who is L1.

"The language to be studied through this syllabus is the recognised modern standard form of Chinese (often referred to as Mandarin) in use in the People's Republic of China, Singapore and the United Nations".

This is an explicit definition of a target language such as this report recommends is essential as the basis for determining who has Chinese as L1 and for whom it is L2. The test for this determination should therefore be based on whether for the student this particular Mandarin was a "language acquired from infancy, in circumstances offering wide opportunities for exchanges with other children and for learning from the speech of adults in that language".

*"Chinese: Second Language is available only to students who are declared to be **non-background candidates** by the Curriculum Council. Typically, non-background candidates have learnt all the Chinese they know in an Australian school or similar environment. Any student who has a background in Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien or any of the regional Chinese languages greater than this is considered a **background candidate**."*

²⁰ Here and elsewhere the term "target language" is used. This term refers to the language in question (say German) whether it is L1 or L2 for some particular individual.

It would indeed "typically" be the case, because Australia is not a Chinese-speaking community, that for a student who learned all their Chinese they know in an Australian school or similar environment (or knew no Chinese at all) Chinese would be an L2 according to the definition proposed in this report. There could be rare students who learned all their Chinese in Australia and for whom Chinese was L1 due to (highly unusually) wide opportunities during the critical period for exchanges in Chinese with other children and for learning from the speech of adults in that language.

The comment about other regional Chinese languages being held equivalent to Mandarin is an expert judgement on which this report cannot comment, other than to say that for it to meet the criteria proposed in this report, there would not only have to be explicit and sufficiently frequent coincidences between say Hokkien and Mandarin in respect to all the outcome-scales (or equivalent) on which students were judged, such as writing characters, pronunciation, etc., but also acceptance of any differences such that a Hokkien accent or a Hokkien interpretation of a character, where that was different from the Mandarin, was not marked as incorrect.

On the face of it, defining Mandarin so tightly in one place yet elsewhere stating that Cantonese substitutes perfectly for it might be worth reconsideration by the Council. Apparent authorities state that although the strings of characters in Mandarin and Cantonese are largely similar, such that speakers of one can read a lot of the other, spoken Cantonese is almost unintelligible to a speaker of only Mandarin²¹. If so, the Council's apparent emphasis on the similarity between Cantonese and Mandarin characters may well reflect the difficulty of learning so many characters and hence be trying to take into account the great benefit of spending huge amounts of time learning them, but it would have little connection with the critical-period stance. If language development through the critical period were to be defined through the spoken language, Cantonese and Mandarin would appear to be different languages.

"Students who do not fit the definition of a non-background candidate, but who can provide reasons why they should be considered for this subject, should make written application to the Chief Executive Officer of the Curriculum Council."

Due to the probabilistic nature of any definition and of any set of criteria, this safeguard is necessary and admirable, though the document is silent on how the written application is judged.

Indeed the document almost defines a background speaker through defining or at least describing the non-background speaker. This is the opposite of what is recommended in this report but it need not be a fatal difference.

What is at stake?

If nothing of great value or moment were at stake, it might not be worthwhile distinguishing between the students who are L1 and L2 for a target language.

For example, because school attendance is compulsory, because streaming of advanced students is neither universal nor excluding other students from excellent opportunities, and because school prizes are not especially valuable, such distinction might not be worthwhile in years 1-10, were it not for two considerations.

The first consideration is that motivation and formal reward for effort have been identified by research as highly influential in L2 acquisition in schooling situations. To the extent that the presence of L1 students in a class predominantly of L2 students might discourage the latter, especially if the former get the rewards, it could prove beneficial to all for the L1 students to be identified, known by the other students to be such, and kept from competing against the L2 students in all stages of schooling.

²¹ John de Francis *The Chinese Language*. 1984

The second consideration might arise from the first. Research has shown that students approaching post-compulsory years in Australia have the following reasons for expecting that they will not study a LOTE in year 11:

1. Simple preference (unrelated to the following) for other subjects when only 4-6 can be chosen.
2. LOTE not enjoyed previously.
3. Expect to get higher marks in other subjects.
4. LOTE is too difficult.
5. Need other subjects for university entry and cannot fit LOTE in.
6. Expects never to reach useful fluency.
7. Too much work for the same mark.
8. Competence in a LOTE not useful to their future.
9. The LOTE they would prefer is not available.

It is clear that a general factor "previous experience with LOTE" covers reasons numbered 2, 4, 7, if not more. Teachers have claimed that L2 students' perceptions of the difficulty of LOTE and their lack of enjoyment of it are aggravated by the presence of L1 students in the class, especially if the L1 students get the rewards, prizes, and praise. The satisfaction of being the best amongst L2 students, getting the top grade for that achievement, and perceiving that the achievement is "enough" and is wholly admirable, and will contribute towards one of the highest-possible TERs seem to be jeopardised by the presence of L1 students who are getting higher grades, especially if those grades will count in the later competition for university places. Thus, again, it could prove beneficial to all for the L1 students to be identified, known by the other students to be such, and kept from competing against the L2 students.

Otherwise the enthusiasm for enrolling in a LOTE in the post-compulsory years might be inhibited.

Once in year 12 there is more explicitly at stake; namely the grade, the mark contributing to the TES and TER, and for the few the chance of an Exhibition or Prize.

Grades in TEE French, German and Italian²² are intended to be awarded according to the "grade-related descriptors" developed by the Curriculum Council and published in its documents and web pages. However, judging from informal comment and submissions to the post-compulsory review, grades in many schools are more likely to be related to the school's marking system which in turn is related to perceptions of marks likely in the external examination. In neither the determination from grade-related descriptors nor the determination of grades from marks, is any allowance suggested, by the Curriculum Council or by the schools to the Curriculum Council, for whether the student is L1 or L2. For reasons hopefully obvious from the arguments in this report, this is potentially extremely inequitable, in the direction of being advantageous to the L1 student. Perhaps fortunately, the effect on future outcomes is limited. The grades are not used for university selection but they might influence selection for TAFE (which is substantially less competitive), selection for employment, and awards of Certificates of Excellence.

The "raw" school marks and external exam marks in TEE French, German and Italian are also arrived at without any allowance being suggested or made for whether the student is L1 or L2. For reasons hopefully obvious from the arguments in this report, this is potentially extremely inequitable, in the direction of being advantageous to the L1 student. As described elsewhere, the L1 students are removed for purposes of finding the scaling parameters, but then reintroduced for the actual rescaling. As explained there, this process almost certainly advantages the L1 students in terms of their eventual combined mark, and

²² And Modern Greek. The tiny numbers in Modern Greek cause it not to be mentioned in this report, for the sake of brevity. The same problem seems to be present in Hebrew, which is accepted by UWA as a TER subject, though examined from NSW in 2002.

therefore their eventual TES and TER. Unfortunately these TERs of the L1 students, being inflated by their language mark, are rendered less good predictors of later performance at university, because the mark of an L1 student in a L2 subject is likely to contain a substantial marks bonus unrelated to general intelligence or general ability in any subject other than that language. This perceived problem is not one entirely for the Curriculum Council, as the construction of the TER is a matter for the universities, and the preceding scaling processes are the joint responsibility of the Curriculum Council and the universities.

With respect to Exhibitions and Awards, the Curriculum Council has complete control. The Council documentation states that a background candidate in a L2 subject cannot use their final mark in that subject to win either a subject exhibition or a general exhibition. Nor may a background candidate win an award in the L2 subject. Such a policy is clearly in line with the thrust of this report, and is consonant with the findings of research. A noticeable disadvantage for L1 students might be caused by this policy, due to the absence of "advanced" Italian, French and German subjects specifically for L1 students. The absence of such subjects may in the past have been justified by the general argument of insufficient numbers²³. The apparent future intention to use Australia-wide CCAFL arrangements to offer a wider range of languages may overcome this problem, for example by one State hosting "German: Advanced" and offering its external examination, syllabus and principles of moderation.

Curriculum Council Information and Procedures on "Background Candidates"

The Council document on this matter²⁴ gives the following definition. Words in italics are copied from the document.

Definition of background and non-background candidates²⁵:

- *Background candidates have often lived and been to school in a country where the target language is one of the major spoken and written languages. They tend to use the target language for communicative interaction or for reading and writing purposes.*
- *Non-background candidates have typically learnt all they know about the target language in an Australian school or similar environment. They may have experienced some stays (e.g. exchanges) in a country where the target language is spoken.*

In the light of the research identified in this report, neither statement can be regarded as a definition, in part because neither consists of questions to which the answer is either yes or no, or statements that either are true or not true for an individual.

However, as a statement of likelihood, the first sentence of the definition of a background candidate is correct. A candidate for whom the target language is L1 is indeed likely to have lived in such a country, specifically for much of the critical period. According to the research, whether they went to school there is of less relevance, and of even less relevance is whether they lived in the country, or went to school there, after the critical period. The second sentence of the Council's definition of a background candidate is not in accord with the suggestions of this report, because it is phrased in the present tense. A student for whom the target language is undeniably L1 but who has been living in Australia for years before entering Year 11 will almost certainly be able to read and write in that language but absolutely need not currently be actively doing so.

²³ In 2002 the following numbers sat the TEE papers. Chinese Advanced 101, Chinese 2nd language 19, French 385, German 87, Indonesian Advanced 129, Indonesian 2nd language 151, Italian 217, Japanese 2nd language 269, Malay Advanced 54, and 11 students had moderated school assessments in Japanese Advanced for which the Curriculum Council has access to the NSW syllabus and external examination (Curriculum Council External Assessment & Certification Report: 2002, pp. 61 and 62).

²⁴ Curriculum Council 100068_1.DOC

²⁵ Like the Council's own documentation, this report sometimes uses "background candidate in the target language" and sometimes "background speaker of the target language", or abbreviations thereof. Both are current equivalents in name to this report's terminology "the target language is L1 for this person" or abbreviations of that.

Similarly, as a statement of likelihood, the first sentence of the Council's definition of a non-background candidate is correct. A candidate who has learned all they know about the target language in an Australian school or similar environment is indeed unlikely to have the language as L1. The second sentence is also correct, and indeed is an understatement. According to the view expressed in this report, no amount of exchanges or other periods spent in a country where the target language is L1, if those stays were outside the critical period, would cause the target language to be L1.

In general, the Council's definitions are neither definitions (on their own) or thoroughly in accord with the recommendations of this report.

They nevertheless are not inappropriate starting points or indications. The Council explains that definition is through adding up points allocated to answers on the Form.

Who identifies background candidates?

Background candidates are identified by:

1. *the subject teacher*
2. *the student*
3. *the markers of the oral interview component of the TEE*

If two of these three indicate that the candidate has a background in the language, the candidate will be classified as a background candidate by the Curriculum Council.

This approach seems very sensible. As remarked in various places earlier, accent (plus to a lesser extent vocabulary in speaking and listening) is perhaps the best single indicator of an L1 student. Therefore, assuming that the markers of the oral interview have expertise in recognising the possibly many accents that must be accommodated within whatever definition of the language is given in the syllabus, they are in an excellent position to make a judgement independent of any personal interest in the candidate that the subject teacher, and the candidate themselves, might have.

The student's own role in self-identification as a background candidate is through the student's completion of the Identification Form that is attached. It should be clear that some of the questions on that Form could be related to the definitions of L1 and L2 proposed in this report, while others are not so related.

Nevertheless, the Form is entirely clear and defensible in its own terms. It is explained in the documentation that points are awarded according to the scoring sheet (attached) and that any student scored at 19 or above is classified as a Background Candidate. The approach used by the Council extends the definition of a background student well beyond the critical period used in this report to define L1.

The teacher's role is signing statements as to whether they believe that

- the student has lived in a country where the language is widely used
- the student has attended a school in which the language was the medium of instruction
- the student has a considerable background in the language

plus adding any additional information relevant to the language background of the student, which may be used in borderline cases.

The Council's objectives seem very clear from its documentation, which states as follows.

Why identify background candidates?

Candidates with no significant background in a language usually demonstrate achievement in the corresponding language subject commensurate with their general academic achievement. This is not the

case with background Candidates, who can be expected to achieve at a relatively high level in the target language regardless of their achievement in other subjects. Because of this, Background Candidates would tend to distort the scaling process, so they are removed from the scaling population. After the scaling parameters have been determined from the scaling population, they are used to allocate marks to all candidates - including Background Candidates. If Background Candidates were included in the scaling population, non-Background Candidates would (typo in original corrected) be given lower scaled marks. It is hoped that teachers will perceive the importance of accurately identifying Background Candidates.

The foregoing italicised extracts seem acceptably in line with the approach recommended in this report. Their major deficiency appears to be the lack of acknowledgment of the advantage gained by L1 students in the L2 subjects in terms of potential contribution towards the TER.

The elements of the Council's criterion

In the following each element is given in italics, followed by comment in the light of the definitions proposed in this report. The comment sometimes includes suggested rewording. Such suggestions have not been given full and complete attention and should not be accepted without further reference to language experts. In particular I have used "age 10" as the critical age, whereas experts might suggest a different age altogether²⁶ or different ages for different questions.

If born outside Australia, month and year of arrival in Australia

This information would be relevant as a check on whether the critical period was spent where the language was L1.

I (the teacher) believe that this student has lived in a country where the language is widely used.

This statement is too imprecise to be relevant to the critical-period stance, and probably should be replaced with something along the lines of "... lived for most of the years from ages 1-10 in a ...".

I (the teacher) believe that this student attended a school in which the language was the medium of instruction.

This statement is too imprecise to be relevant to the critical-period stance, and probably should be replaced with something along the lines of "... a school for most of their schooling up to age 10 in which...".

Beginning with year 12, complete the details of each year down to the beginning of primary school (showing) country in which you attended school and major language(s) used by teachers in classes such as Mathematics, Social Studies, etc.

According to the critical-period stance, years beyond about year 8 are irrelevant for students who are of the usual age to be in year 12 when they complete the form. However, the question is acceptable in general, and could provide useful data to enable statistical investigations of factors affecting marks in the subject, and checks against the teacher's and markers' opinions of whether the student is L1. It is suggested that the Council carry out such statistical investigations.

Which language(s) do your parent(s) or guardian(s) speak at home with each other?

Which language(s) do your parent(s) or guardian(s) speak at home with you?

Which language(s) do you speak at home with your parent(s) or guardian(s)?

Which language(s) do you speak at home with your siblings?

²⁶ Ideally administered somewhere towards the end of the critical period or just after, and presumably under 13 if this report's reading of the critical period is correct.

As questions directed to a year-12 student these are probably irrelevant to the critical-period stance, apart from offering supplementary or circumstantial evidence to back up a conclusion that can be reached from other answers. It would be more relevant to ask what languages were spoken at home during the critical period. If the questionnaire were administered somewhere towards the end of the critical period or just after, this question would be a relevant question, though even then it would be better directed to the entire critical period.

Which language(s) can you read for purposes other than schoolwork/homework? (Do not include languages you have learned only in an Australian classroom.)

Which language(s) can you write for purposes other than schoolwork/homework? (Do not include languages you have learned only in an Australian classroom.)

As administered to a year-12 student these questions are probably so irrelevant to the critical period as to be inequitable. For example a year-12 student could have lived for years 9,10,11 in Germany and battled to learn German from scratch without advantage of a background in German during the critical period. They might thus be able to read and write German, for example in letters back to German friends. To classify them as L1: German would be quite contrary to the critical-period approach. If administered somewhere towards the end of the critical period or just after these would be relevant questions.

The scoring sheet states as follows in relation to the definition of "the target language".

For French and German, if dialects such as Creole, Canadian French or Swiss German are indicated, give the points in brackets.

For Italian, if dialects such as Abruzese, Calabrese or Sicilian are indicated, do not allocate points.

It was earlier indicated how sensitive these definitions of target language have to be, and how closely related to the objectives, syllabus, marking guidelines and level descriptors of the subject. For example if the majority of the grammar and vocabulary of "French dialect X" were the same as those for "Target French" and only the pronunciation were significantly different, and if the French dialect X pronunciation were to be acceptable in the oral examination, then French dialect X should be accepted as part of Target French. The report argues earlier for a very accommodating acceptance of accent in oral examinations. Putting it another way, it requires a significant difference in at least one of the examined dimensions (outcome scales) between Target French and French dialect X for them to be classified as different languages.

If the agreement of school systems could be obtained, it is suggested that, in accord with arguments elsewhere in this report, there is value in determining who are Background Speakers through tests or questionnaires administered somewhere towards the end of the critical period or just after it rather than waiting until Year 12.

Summary of general findings

1. Different treatment of L1 and L2 students is justified by research.
2. The distinction between L1 and L2 students should be according to a criterion based on the critical-period stance.
3. The current distinction is only approximately related to the critical-period stance and is open to criticism.
4. If the distinction were altered to be more in line with the critical-period stance the following findings 5-7 should be true. With the current distinction there could be examples of inequity in the calculation of marks and in the eligibility for awards.
5. Where a language is offered as a "Second language" for L2 students and an "Advanced" version for L1 students there is no inequity, assuming that current scaling processes are applied to both, and students in both are equally eligible for awards.
6. Given current scaling processes, where there are L1 students in an L2 subject, the L1 students gain an inequitable advantage in the calculation of their final combined mark and hence in their TER.
7. A solution would be either to have an Advanced and a Second Language subject for every language that is offered, or at least separate examinations and scales for the two groups.
8. Because of the criticisms of the current distinction, some students in L2 subjects who are classified as L1 may be disadvantaged in terms of access to awards.
9. However, as with all subjects, the Curriculum Council cannot avoid questions of cost when considering the possibility of offering more low-enrolment subjects. Neither a perfection of avoidance of every possible inequity nor a perfection in range of offerings is likely to be affordable. Cost and equity, or even handedness, seem to be inevitably traded off against one another.
10. The inequities referred to above, and the inequity of some proposed alternatives, are likely to affect motivation to study languages, among L2 students, L1 students wanting to improve their L1, or both.
11. In the future system of outcome scales with levels, if the levels are to be transformed into ratings or marks that can be added together, attention will have to be given to the issues addressed in this report.
12. Any hypothetical future policy of "not attempting to identify the background candidates (L1 students)" is likely to involve even more inequities than a policy of attempting to identify the background candidates and deal with them separately.

The partial analogy and partial lack of analogy with English and English as a Second Language

There is no doubt that the critical period advantage applies to the acquisition of English as it applies to the acquisition of any other language.

Therefore the vast majority of TEE students, who are born in Australia and learned English as L1 in their critical period, have various advantages over all those other TEE students for whom English is L2.

[IT WOULD TAKE MORE TIME TO DEVELOP THIS SECTION IF IT IS REQUIRED]

Comment on various specific queries that might be raised

It might be questioned why a student cannot use English as a Second Language in the calculation of TES or TER.

The manner in which the TES and TER are calculated is not the responsibility of the Curriculum Council, apart from any constraints that the Council might put on the assessments transmitted to TISC. In the light of the sorts of issues given attention in this report, this prohibition on using ESL in the TES looks questionable, but because it is not a Council responsibility the issue is not pursued here in detail.

It might be questioned whether the Curriculum Council has a legal mandate to take the various backgrounds of candidates into account when it determines the scaling parameters and scaling population; and in particular that linguistic background as used in defining background candidates is an arbitrary selection from all the backgrounds that could possibly affect performance.

This report has endeavoured to explain why, although many genetic and environmental factors affect performance, the acquisition of L1 in the critical period is qualitatively and quantitatively different from these others and warrants the distinction being made between L1 and L2 students in L2 subjects.

It might be questioned why that the Council makes distinctions between languages and dialects.

This report has offered general guidelines for definitions of languages and indicated the sensitivity and difficulty of such definitions. Expertise in the several dialects of a language is necessary in those responsible for drawing up a final definition. The Background Candidate Scoring Sheet attaches points according to the country in which school was attended. This is unlikely to be well related to the critical-period stance. Even if it were to be decided by the Council that the critical period extends into primary school and that therefore the language of instruction and social exchange during those years is relevant, the country in which the school is located may not be relevant to the extent of attracting extra points because of the instances in which the name of the country may be the same as the name of the target language but in the region of the school another language is in use.

It might be questioned whether the Council is entitled to employ arguments as “technical” as those in this report in respect to the issue of identifying Background Candidates, when it could perhaps be argued that such identification is a form of illegal discrimination.

This is a point of view that should be resisted. The matters referred to in this report, which might be thought “technical”, are of the essence of the Curriculum Council’s case that definition of L1 students is necessary, and that they should be treated in appropriately different ways. The Council has on its file a suggestion from the Equal Opportunity Commissioner that the Council should defend its rules on the basis of “objectively determined, sound research and technical knowledge”. That suggestion should be sufficient support of a “technical” approach.

It might be suggested that having separate ways of dealing with background candidates has some unstated purpose of benefiting “native Australian” students at the expense of those who spent their childhood overseas, and therefore is “unlawful discrimination”.

The arguments in this report should be used to counter such a complaint, regardless of the apparent fact that the background candidates are advantaged by the processes, not disadvantaged.

It might be questioned why the Council excludes the subject English from the processes distinguishing between background and non-background candidates and dealing with their marks.

The part of this report dealing with English and ESL, if extended, would be intended to offer some suggestions as to how to deal with such a question. Whether or not it is this report that is extended to cover this issue, it is an issue that the Curriculum Council needs to address.

Arguments might be raised against details of the calculations in the Identification Form, for example that the calculation is unfair where it allocates two points of difference where two candidates are identical except that one has an infant sibling with whom the candidate “converses” in French.

Given the importance to marks and awards, and potentially to the scaling process, of the classification of students as “background”, the Council should be prepared to mount a rigorous quantitative defence of the counting system used in the Identification Form, if it intends to persist with it. Equally, if a new system of identification is to be developed, that will have to be defensible and transparent, etc. As argued earlier, some of the questions on the Form seem not in accord with the most relevant research findings about language acquisition, and might be better suited to the gathering of circumstantial evidence, leaving the final determination to a more focussed and expert judgement.

It might be questioned why the Council treats language background so differently from any other dimension of social environment.

This report has pointed to the weight of evidence that acquisition of L1 is so cognitively different as to require separation and different treatment from other aspects of environment where the Council is dealing with an L2 subject. Given that some laws, and the Declaration of Human Rights, proscribe against discrimination on the basis of language, the Council needs to frame its policies very carefully, using arguments such as those in this report. The issues related to acquisition of L1 must be able to be seen by the Council's stakeholders to be different from those associated with school attended, educational background of parents, genetics, parental wealth, early commencement of formal study, etc.

Just one line of argument is that from actual or possible ex-post statistical investigations, which show that although the TER doubtless reflects a student's school attended, educational background of parents, genetics, parental wealth, and early commencement of formal study, the TER is a good predictor of success in later educational endeavours, as are (to understandably different extents) marks in its individual subjects. But the marks of L1 students in L2 subjects would probably be found to be very poor predictors, being far more a product of nothing more than the L1 background than of any academic potential or attainment. Incidentally, this is the reason for the Council having to give careful attention to the necessary differences between its descriptions of levels for L1 students and L2 students if both groups are to be in the same courses of study. Otherwise, the levels are likely to be grossly out of alignment in terms of cognitive difficulty.

It might be enquired as to whether the European cultures have similar rules to systematically disadvantage so called background speakers. This query might arise because German, French and Italian are the languages in which the problem of identification is not addressed by the availability of a “Advanced” subject.

Investigation of the policies across Western Europe with respect to access of L1 students to L2 subjects that form part of highly competitive university admission systems would require more time.

One web site²⁷ reports similar issues in Wales as those faced by the Curriculum Council, as follows.

Adi Bloom "The Times Educational Supplement July 12, 2002" News; No.4489; Pg.10. Teachers have been criticised for allowing native speakers to cruise through a GCSE meant for those who learn Welsh as a second language. Adi Bloom reports.

Pupils who speak Welsh as a first language are gaining an unfair advantage in their GCSEs, by sitting exams intended for English speakers, according to a Welsh pressure group. There are two forms of Welsh-language exam: one is intended for fluent speakers whose first language is Welsh, or who have attended a Welsh-medium school; the other is for pupils who have learned the language from scratch in the classroom. But this two-tier system, says RhAG, the association of parents for Welsh-medium education, is currently being abused by pupils from Welsh-speaking backgrounds, who are choosing to sit exams designed to test second-language speakers. The association said fluent candidates raised grade boundaries, penalising those for whom the GCSE was really intended. "Welsh speakers are getting all the best marks," said Tim Pearce, spokesman for RhAG. "Because of the way the exam and marking system works, this means the others cannot do as well." And it is not only Welsh second-language learners who suffer, says RhAG: first-language speakers are being disadvantaged as they are not being challenged. "They are not taxed as much by the courses as they should be, so they lose linguistic skills," said Mr Pearce. Yet heads argue that there is clear justification for entering their pupils for the easier exam. Neil Foden, head of the bilingual Ysgol Friars, in Bangor, allows his pupils to sit the second-language exam at the end of Year 9 or 10. The more able students then go on to sit the first-language exam. "If they sit Welsh as a second language, they have a bankable qualification, and they can then go on and push themselves," he said. "I could put a kid in for Welsh first-language who is expecting a row of As, and a C or D in Welsh language but it would demotivate them. We shouldn't turn them off the language." A spokesperson for Jane Davidson, Welsh Assembly minister for education and lifelong learning, acknowledged that the issue of Welsh speakers doing the easier GCSE had been brought to her attention. "We will be looking at it as part of a broader review of the 14 to 19 phase," she said.

It might be suggested that many students lie on their Identification Form, and that proving or disproving many of the answers would be close to impossible, for example without having someone eavesdrop conversations inside a home, and for the eavesdropper to be an expert on a particular dialect.

It does seem difficult to know whether the respondents are being truthful, or even if they have sufficient linguistic knowledge to be able to properly answer the questions. Although the Council, and other organisations, at times have to rely on truthfulness such as in Statutory Declarations, and although the Form offers the opportunity for teacher opinion and comment, veracity could be an issue.

This report suggests relying on a test administered on the student at or just after the critical period. Questions such as those in the Form might then be useful ancillary indications, but would not be relied on to the present extent.

Comments from the Equal Opportunity Commissioner

(8 Aug 2002 paraphrased as follows) The criteria for determining who is a background speaker must be objectively justifiable and reasonable. The Council must document these criteria and their factual, technical and logical basis. The Council must set up a trail of evidence to show that it has, by considering the possibility of discrimination, avoided illegal discrimination by arriving at the current rules on the basis of objectively determined, sound research and technical knowledge.

This report proposes a basis in sound research findings that might avoid any illegal discrimination. In doing so, it suggests some deficiencies in the current rules.

²⁷ <http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsil/LPRU/newsarchive/Art684.txt>.

Our Ref: XEO/baclan

Attention: Teacher-in-charge of Languages Other Than English (LOTE)
(through the Principal)

Background Candidates in French, German, Italian and Modern Greek - 2002 TEE

All students enrolled in Year 12 French, German, Italian or Modern Greek, need to be identified as background candidates or non-background candidates. Your cooperation is sought in identifying these students in your school and communicating the information to me at the Curriculum Council.

To assist with this process, please find enclosed:

- *Background Candidates – Information and Procedure* (pink);
For the information of teachers and students, general information about background candidates is provided, together with instructions for the procedures to be followed by teachers in identifying such candidates (reverse side). Multiple copies are enclosed for schools where more than one of these subjects is taught.
- *Background Candidate Identification Form – 2002* (sand);
All students studying a target language (even if they do not intend to sit the Tertiary Entrance Examination) must complete one of these forms. All completed forms are to be returned to the Curriculum Council. Please ensure that, where required, documentation is included with your students' forms.
- *Scoring Sheet – Background Candidates* (green);
This sheet provides details on how to score students on their responses to questions in the *Background Candidate Identification Form*. Multiple copies are enclosed, where appropriate.
- School list/s of students enrolled in target language/s (computer printout).
The list/s should be completed and endorsed after all *Background Candidate Identification Forms* have been completed. The top copy of the completed list/s must be returned to the Curriculum Council; the second copy should be retained for your records.

Completed forms and lists should be sent to:

☒ Attention: Trina Edwards
Curriculum Council
27 Walters Drive
OSBORNE PARK WA 6017 (By **Wednesday 21 August 2002**)

Should you have any further queries or comments please contact either Clare Busing, Curriculum Officer LOTE by telephone on (08) 9273 6355 or me on (08) 9273 6312.

Thank you for your cooperation.

TRINA EDWARDS

COORDINATOR EXAMINATIONS (PRACTICAL)

18 July 2002

Background Candidates – Information and Procedure

The following information is provided for teachers and students.

Definition of background and non-background candidates:

- **Background candidates** have often lived and been to school in a country where the target language is one of the major spoken and written languages. They tend to use the target language for communicative interaction or for reading and writing purposes.
- **Non-background candidates** have typically learnt all they know about the target language in an Australian school or similar environment. They may have experienced some stays (eg exchanges) in a country where the target language is spoken.

Who identifies background candidates?

Background candidates are identified by:

1. the subject teacher
2. the student
3. the markers of the oral interview component of the Tertiary Entrance Examination.

If two of these three indicate that the candidate has a background in the language, the candidate will be classified as a background candidate by the Curriculum Council.

How are private candidates categorised?

Private candidates who enrol for an examination in French, German, Italian or Modern Greek are automatically classified as background candidates unless they demonstrate otherwise by writing to the Manager Certification and Examinations, Curriculum Council, by Friday 20 September 2002.

Why identify background candidates?

Candidates with no significant background in a language usually demonstrate achievement in the corresponding language subject commensurate with their general academic achievement. This is not the case with Background Candidates, who can be expected to achieve at a relatively high level in the target language regardless of their achievement in other subjects. Because of this, Background Candidates would tend to distort the scaling process, so they are removed from the scaling population. After the scaling parameters have been determined from the scaling population, they are used to allocate scaled marks to all candidates - including Background Candidates.

If Background Candidates were included in the scaling population, non-Background Candidates would be given lower scaled marks. It is hoped that teachers will perceive the importance of accurately identifying all Background Candidates.

Can background candidates win Curriculum Council Exhibitions and Awards?

Background candidates are eligible to win Curriculum Council Exhibitions and Awards, provided they do not use their final mark in their (background) language to win them. Background candidates may not win an award in the (background) language. (Please refer to Insert to Curriculum Council Circular 02/01.)

PTO for procedures to be followed by teachers.

Procedure:

It is recommended that teachers work with students to complete all sections of the *Background Candidate Identification Forms* before completing the details on the computer printout.

1. Inform students that being identified as background candidates will not have a negative effect on their final mark in the target language, but that it may make them ineligible for some Curriculum Council awards (refer Insert to Circular 02/01 and *Year 12 Information Guide 2002*).
2. Distribute *Background Candidate Identification Forms* to all of your students (including non-examination candidates), and assist them in completing Part A (Candidate Details).

Note: If a student was born outside Australia, supporting documentation must be provided by the student. Copies of the documentation must be held at the school, and may be requested by the Curriculum Council.

3. Guide your students through completing Part C (Background Information) and in adding up their scores, using the enclosed scoring sheet (green).
4. Collect the forms from the students, and:
 - Check the responses given by your students, as well as their tally at the bottom of the page. (Any student who scores 19 or above is classified as a background candidate.)
 - Enter each student's final score in the box provided on the top right hand corner on the front of the form.
 - Complete the Teacher Endorsement in Part B.
 - Each form must be endorsed by the Principal (Part B) – see 7 below.
5. Both you and the student are invited to make additional comments, which may be relevant to the student's background in the language. Additional comments may be attached to the form.

Note: This additional information may be used to determine background status, in borderline cases. Where appropriate, the Curriculum Council will contact schools to clarify any of the information provided by the teacher or student.

6. Completing the student list (computer printout):
 - Tick the YES column next to the names of students who **you** believe have a background in the language. (Under the heading 'Teacher Assessment'.)
 - Ask students who assessed themselves as background candidates to sign in the space provided next to their name on the student list. (Any student who scored at least 19 in Part C.)
 - In the case of students **you** believe to be non-background candidates, tick the NO column on the list of students.
 - The completed student list must be endorsed by the principal – see 7 below.
7. The school Principal is required to endorse the completed student list, and each of the student declaration forms (Part B), before the information is returned to the Curriculum Council.
8. Please return
 - the **top copy** of the completed student list
 - **all** *Background Candidate Identification Forms*
 - to the Curriculum Council by **Wednesday 21 August 2002**.

☐ Attention: Trina Edwards
Curriculum Council
27 Walters Drive
OSBORNE PARK WA 6017



Background Candidate Identification Form – 2002 TEE

Subject: French

Please tick (✓) German

Italian

Modern Greek

Teacher to Complete
Final Score

Part A: Candidate Details (To be completed by student)

Student number: School:

Family name/surname (please print) Mr/Ms/Miss/Mrs:

Given names (please print)

Date of birth: Country of birth:

If born outside Australia, month and year of arrival in Australia:

(Supporting documentation must be provided to your school.)

Telephone number during term (after hours):

Part B : School Endorsements (To be completed after student completes the details on the reverse side.)

Teacher Endorsement
 Name of Teacher: (please print) Mr/Ms/Miss/Mrs.....

1. I believe that:

- This student **has lived** in a country where the language is widely used **Yes / No**
- This student **attended a school** in which the language was the medium of instruction. **Yes / No**

2. I feel that this student has a considerable background in this language. **Yes / No / I'm not sure**
 Please comment if you have additional information relevant to the language background of this student.

***Note: The above information may be used to determine background status in borderline cases. Where necessary, the Curriculum Council will contact schools to clarify any of the above.**
Teacher's signature: **Date:**

Principal's Endorsement
 I certify that the above information is correct to the best of my knowledge, and that, where relevant, supporting documentation is held at the school.
Principal's Name: **Principal's Signature:**

Part C: Background Information (To be completed by student)

Schooling Background:

Beginning with Year 12, complete the details of each year down to the beginning of primary school
Every space for every year of schooling must be completed.

Calendar year	Academic year	Name of school you attended	Country in which you attended school	Major language(s) used by teachers in classes such as Mathematics, Social Studies etc
2002	12			
2001	11			
2000	10			
1999	9			
1998	8			
1997	7			
1996	6			
1995	5			
1994	4			
1993	3			
1992	2			
1991	1			
1990				

Other Information and Student Declaration

- List the language(s) you use in your home/leisure time, beginning with the one you use most frequently. If you use English either as your first, second or third language, include English in your ranking - for example, if you use English most, write it in the first column.
- If a dialect, or variation of the language is used, rather than the standard language, name the dialect or variation.
- **Do not name more than one language in a space.**

	Most used	Second most used	Third most used
1. Which language(s) do your parents or guardian(s) speak at home with each other?			
2. Which language(s) do your parents or guardian(s) speak at home with you?			
3. Which language(s) do you speak at home with your parents or guardian(s)?			
4. Which language(s) do you speak at home with your siblings?			
5. Which language(s) can you read for purposes other than schoolwork/homework? (Do not include languages you have learned only in an Australian classroom.)			
6. Which language(s) can you write for purposes other than schoolwork/homework? (Do not include languages you have learned only in an Australian classroom.)			

Other relevant comments:

Final Score: _____

I declare that, to the best of my knowledge, all the information I have given on this form (and any attachments) is correct.

Signature of Student: **Date:**



Scoring Sheet – Background Candidates

Schooling Background:

Apply the following scoring system for the target language or a target language country:

Calendar year	Academic year	Name of school you attended	Country in which you attended school	Major language(s) used by teachers in classes such as Mathematics, Science, Social Studies etc
2002	12		4	4
2001	11		4	4
2000	10		4	4
1999	9		4	4
1998	8		4	4
1997	7		4	4
1996	6		4	4
1995	5		2	2
1994	4		2	2
1993	3		2	2
1992	2		2	2
1991	1		2	2
1990				

Other Information:

Questions 1-4: For French and German, if dialects such as Creole, Canadian French or Swiss German are indicated, give the points in brackets.

For Italian, if dialects such as Abruzzese, Calabrese or Sicilian are indicated, do not allocate points.

If the language and a dialect are both given for one question, count the first one only.

	Most used	Second most used	Third most used
1. Which language(s) do your parents or guardian(s) speak at home with each other?	2 (1)	1	0
2. Which language(s) do your parents or guardian(s) speak at home with you?	2 (1)	1	0
3. Which language(s) do you speak at home with your parents or guardian(s)?	2 (1)	1	0
4. Which language(s) do you speak at home with your siblings?	2 (1)	1	0
5. Which language(s) can you read for purposes other than schoolwork/homework?	4	4	4
6. Which language(s) can you write for purposes other than schoolwork/homework?	4	4	4

Any student who scores 19 points or more is considered a background candidate