

# Strengthening Chinese language provision in senior secondary schooling

## Discussion paper

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# Discussion paper

## Strengthening Chinese language provision in senior secondary schooling

### Background

Chinese language is currently offered at three different levels within the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE): Chinese First Language (CFL), Chinese Second Language (CSL) and Chinese Second Language Advanced (CSLA).

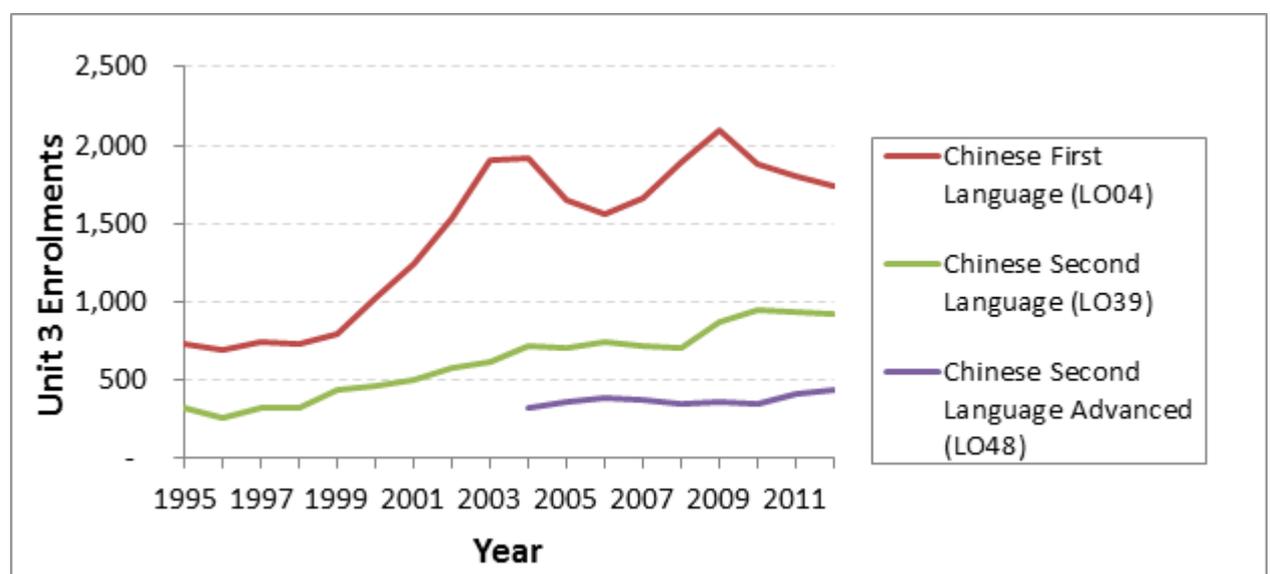
CFL is designed for students who have spent significant time as a resident and/or had significant experience of studying Chinese in a country in which Chinese is a major language of communication and medium of instruction. Students who are eligible for English as an Additional Language (EAL) are typically enrolled in CFL.

CSL is designed for students who have studied the language for at least 200 hours prior to the commencement of Unit 1. Some students with less formal experience are also able to successfully meet the requirements of the course.

CSLA is designed for students who typically have had more experience of learning Chinese than those undertaking CSL, but not as much exposure to Chinese language as those eligible for CFL.

Each of these levels provides the same level of credit towards the VCE, each can be used to contribute to a student's Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) and each attracts the same current ATAR languages bonus.

The number of students undertaking the study of Chinese Second Language at Year 12 level has increased steadily over the past decade, as the graph below illustrates.



There is, however, a common perception that, despite the different levels of Chinese language courses that are available, students who do not have a Chinese language background are currently discouraged from continuing with their study of Chinese language as part of their senior secondary program of study. This, it is argued, is because of concerns they will not be able to compete on an equal level with those who do have a background in Chinese language.

This Discussion Paper is designed to seek feedback from teachers of Chinese language and the broader education community on steps that might be taken to address these concerns and so encourage more non-background speakers of Chinese to include the study of Chinese in their senior secondary program of study.

Six possible initiatives are outlined below. These are not intended to be considered as alternative actions. All could be adopted or some different combinations of the possible initiatives could be adopted.

In summary, the six possible initiatives are as follows:

1. A double ATAR bonus that would recognise and reward students for having achieved a level of communicative competence in both English and Mandarin
2. A modified set of eligibility criteria for the current three VCE Chinese studies
3. An *ab initio* course which would allow students to commence the study of VCE Units 1 and 2 Chinese at Beginner level
4. A new VCE Chinese study, which would include conversational Chinese and the study of Chinese culture and society. The component of cultural studies in this study would be undertaken and assessed in English
5. Expansion of the current VET Applied Language (Mandarin) study based on the two current VET Certificates in Chinese language
6. A new scored VCE VET Chinese study based on either Certificate III in Mandarin or Certificate III in Applied Language (Mandarin).

Each of these six possible initiatives is outlined in more detail below.

## Initiative 1: Double bonus

This initiative would expand the current languages bonus applied as part of the ATAR calculation to a 'double bonus'. This would only apply where students have undertaken the highest levels of both Chinese and English or elect to undertake a level of either or both Chinese and/or English that is higher than the level for which they are eligible.

This initiative is designed to provide an incentive for more capable students to enrol in the more difficult levels of Chinese. Many of these students, it is argued, are currently eligible for and therefore enrol in Chinese Second Language (CSL) rather than Chinese Second Language Advanced (CSLA). This would therefore, it is argued, enable more non-background students to achieve the higher range of scores in CSL. More non-background students may then be attracted to enrol in CSL as they would no longer perceive that they were competing with such large numbers of Chinese-background students.

Further, under this initiative, students of Chinese-speaking background would be recognised and rewarded for the extra work undertaken to increase their proficiency in both their first language and English. This would recognise that while language background can be an advantage, language proficiency still demands a high level of application and concerted study. Bilingualism would be acknowledged as an important and valued community resource.

However, initial modelling suggests that the double bonus may not provide a sufficient incentive for students to shift enrolment from CSL to CSLA, because of both the level of scaling that currently applies to CSL and the additional study workload involved in CSLA.

## Initiative 2: Modified eligibility

The VCAA has received many requests for this option from schools offering VCE CSL to non-background learners. They generally request that no student with any Chinese background be permitted to enrol in CSL. Advocates for this course of action argue that if all students of Chinese-speaking background were excluded from CSL, enrolments of non-background learners in VCE Chinese would increase.

However, the VCAA also receives many submissions from those who argue that the eligibility requirements should be relaxed rather than strengthened. These submissions argue that the current eligibility requirements potentially punish high achieving students who have a limited background in Chinese but who work hard to learn Chinese in Australia. They argue that the VCAA does not enforce eligibility requirements, for example, for students of music who grow up with a strong music background, and that the current eligibility requirements are therefore discriminatory.

The current eligibility requirements are set out below:

### Chinese Second Language

A student is NOT eligible for Chinese Second Language if they have had either:

- 12 months or more education in a school where Chinese is the medium of instruction, or
- three years (36 months) or more residence in any of the VCAA-nominated countries or regions (the nominated countries and regions are China, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Macau).

### Chinese Second Language Advanced

A student is eligible for Chinese Second Language Advanced if:

- they have had no more than seven years of education in a school where Chinese is the medium of instruction
- the highest level of education attained in a school where Chinese is the medium of instruction is no greater than the equivalent of Year 7 in a Victorian school.

It would be possible to modify these in a range of ways. One example is as follows:

### Chinese Second Language

A student is NOT eligible for Chinese Second Language if they:

- have had more than 200 hours' study of the language at the secondary level (or the equivalent); or
- have had more than one year's formal education from the first year of primary education in a school where the language is the medium of instruction; or
- have had more than three years' residency in the past 10 years in a country where the language is the medium of communication; or
- regularly use the language for sustained communication outside the classroom, including, but not limited to, the home.

The VCAA has convened numerous working groups to consider this issue over the past 10 years. A critical factor has been the need for compliance with a range of privacy and anti-discrimination legislation. This includes legal advice that it is not consistent with current

legislation to prohibit students from enrolment in areas of study on account of their birthplace or their parents' birthplace.

An inherent difficulty with this proposal, as with all proposals that involve eligibility requirements, is determining mechanisms for establishing the veracity of the application. Measures that are sometimes advocated for eligibility ignore the fact that many students who may have some Chinese-language background in fact have family lines of Australian birth going back many generations. Victoria and other jurisdictions have utilised a range of requirements in the past, including statutory declarations in relation to previous hours of study and instruction and the use of the language outside the classroom. The difficulties associated with this issue of establishing the veracity of applications has led to Victoria's current eligibility requirements.

### Initiative 3: *Ab initio* course

Under current arrangements, it is recommended that students should have studied Chinese for at least 200 hours before they enrol in Unit 1 CSL. This initiative would result in the development of a new VCE Chinese Unit 1–4 study designed for students who are beginning their study of Chinese language.

The key advantage of this proposal is that it would provide an option for students who have decided later in their schooling that they would like to pursue the study of Chinese language. This could include students of Chinese-speaking background who have not undertaken any formal study of Chinese as part of their schooling.

A difficulty associated with this option is that eligibility criteria would need to be developed, and, it may be argued, a situation similar to the one that is perceived to exist in relation to CSL might also apply to enrolments in an *ab initio* course.

A further difficulty is that it might encourage some students to delay their study of Chinese until Year 11 instead of commencing that study much earlier in their schooling.

### Initiative 4: New study in Chinese culture and language

Under this proposal, a new VCE study would be developed that focuses on the study of Chinese culture and society and provides an introduction to conversational Chinese. The elements of this course that focused on culture and society would be taught and assessed in English. It is envisaged that students would be able to use their score in this VCE study as one of their best four studies for the calculation of their ATAR.

Advocates of this proposal argue that it may attract students who wish to undertake the study of Chinese language at a tertiary level through a university beginners-level course. It is also argued that the provision of such a study supports the broader goals of developing a more 'Asia-literate' population.

A potential disadvantage of this proposal is that the provision of an 'easier' option, when compared to the full language courses, may encourage more non-background speakers to opt out of enrolment in the current, more demanding Chinese language courses.

Depending on the extent of specific language study included in this study, eligibility criteria may need to be developed and applied.

## Initiative 5: Expansion of VET language courses

Two nationally recognised VET Chinese language certificates are already available as part of the VCE through Block Credit Recognition: the Certificate III in Mandarin and Certificate III in Applied Language (Mandarin).

These courses are growing in popularity in some schools.

These two VET courses provide an alternative pathway allowing students to undertake a course in Chinese language that has a greater focus on spoken language and a more specific vocational orientation.

Because these courses are unscored they cannot be used as one of the 'best four' subjects in the calculation of the ATAR. However, as with other unscored VET studies, they attract block credit and therefore an increment as a fifth or sixth VCE study that does count in the calculation of the ATAR.

As no scores are awarded, there is no need for eligibility criteria and any student may enrol.

Under this initiative, the current availability of these courses would be promoted to schools and students, and schools would be supported through cluster arrangements to provide access to these courses.

Advocates for this proposal argue that the expansion of these courses would encourage more non-background students to include Chinese in their VCE program of study as they would receive an increment for successful completion of the course and would not be competing with other students for high scores.

The key disadvantages of this proposal are that it may encourage more able students to opt out of more demanding courses of study, and students cannot include unscored VET studies as one of their best four subjects for the purpose of the calculation of the ATAR.

## Initiative 6: Introduction of new VET Applied Languages scored study

The two nationally recognised VET Chinese courses that are already available, Certificate III in Mandarin and Certificate III in Applied Language (Mandarin), could be adapted to become scored VCE VET programs. This would mean the programs would include an external examination and the study score could be used as one of the student's primary four for the ATAR. It is expected that the current VTAC Languages bonus would apply. The emphasis on oral language and the focus on vocational language would remain.

The VCAA would need to develop eligibility criteria for these courses. In the development of eligibility criteria, issues similar to those that currently exist for CSL may arise.

## Responding to this Discussion Paper

Organisations and individuals are invited to provide submissions in response to this paper by Friday 28 June 2013.

Respondents should feel free to address any aspect of the proposals, and responses should be submitted using the [online form](#).

Or mailed to:        Ian Jordan  
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                             Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority  
                             Level 1, 2 Lonsdale Street  
                             Melbourne 3000

### Further information:

- The Victorian Government's *Vision for Languages Education*, is available from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) website: [www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/pages/languagevision.aspx?Redirect=1](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/department/pages/languagevision.aspx?Redirect=1)
- Certification requirements for the VCE and VCAL are available at the VCAA website: [www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/index.aspx](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/index.aspx)
- Tertiary entrance arrangements are available at the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) website: [www.vtac.edu.au/](http://www.vtac.edu.au/)