

Submission

on the

**Ministry of Development Consultation on
Social Cohesion for Everyone in New Zealand**

from the

Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group

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Contact for more information

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment as part of the Consultation on Inclusion and Social Cohesion. We are interested in presenting an oral submission if this can be done in Auckland, or via video conferencing.

This submission has been assembled based on the collective knowledge and experience of the members of the Auckland Languages Working Group, who span all sectors of education, plus research and community, across a wide range of languages and areas of language expertise. More detail on the group, our membership, key messages and achievements to date, is included in Appendix One.

Executive summary

Overall, we agree with the proposed definition of social cohesion and we agree that improving social cohesion is an important and urgent goal for our nation, given our increasing diversity and the evidence of ongoing racism and other forms of discrimination.

We have focused this submission on the recommendations in Section 5 of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Mosques on 15 March 2019 (*hereafter: the Royal Commission*), and the proposals for strengthening social inclusion outlined in *Social Inclusion in New Zealand: Rapid evidence report (2020, MSD Wellington)* (*hereafter: SINZ*).

We believe that all sectors of society, including government, communities, organisations, corporates and individuals, have a role in improving Aotearoa's social cohesion.

SINZ stresses the draft nature of its proposals. It strikes us that language issues sit at the heart of the goals in SINZ and Recommendations 28 and 36 in the Royal Commission. To achieve social inclusion all members of society need to be heard in the language(s) they feel most comfortable using.

We would like to see more recognition of the important role of language diversity, including the recognition, maintenance, learning and use of all the languages of our nation, in supporting social cohesion. Of the six key ways to build social cohesion that are mentioned in the Rapid Evidence Review, language diversity-related actions are particularly important in the following four key ways:

- Key way #2 – fostering and facilitating positive interactions between people
- Key way #4 – supporting people to have the knowledge and skills they need to participate
- Key way #5 – supporting people to have a voice and feel heard
- Key way #6 – reducing inequality and improving opportunities for people by providing support and resources

In the sections below we have commented on the language aspects of each of the above key ways to build social cohesion. We have also commented on the role that a well-crafted National Languages Policy could play in supporting coherent action towards increasing social cohesion.

Fostering and facilitating positive interactions between people

The role of language learning in intercultural interactions:

Interaction among people of different cultures and backgrounds (through things like festivals and language weeks, and also through everyday interactions) can greatly enhance intercultural understanding, especially if people already understand that there is more than one way of thinking, and that different world-views and approaches are valid and can bring new ideas and richness to life.

Learning another language is a powerful way to understand other cultures and ways of thinking because language is inextricably linked with culture and world-view. For example, when we learn te reo Māori, we come across terms like whānau, wairua and utu, none of which have an exact equivalent in English. Even relatively minimal learning of another language can bring insights into the culture and ways of thinking related to that language, and this can improve intercultural understanding of the culture concerned and also of other cultures (because it builds awareness of cultural difference in general).

Students of te reo also gain a greater appreciation of the role that language plays in the identity of Māori as tangata whenua and as a New Zealander.

Unfortunately, in the last ten years, Aotearoa New Zealand has experienced a significant decrease in the number of secondary students learning languages as a subject at school. At the same time, trends would suggest that there is also a decrease in the number of students continuing to use and learn their own family heritage languages. This has direct implications for inter-cultural understanding.

The importance of language maintenance:

Language maintenance is also important in social cohesion. Children and young people who maintain and learn languages which are spoken in the local community have greater opportunities to interact across diverse groups and are able to interact more effectively across generations in immigrant families creating greater family cohesion.

It is important to challenge popular perceptions that migrants need to choose between maintaining their first language and becoming fluent in English. This implies that proficiency in one language negatively affects proficiency in another, as though learning languages were a zero-sum game. In fact, becoming fluent in more than one language strengthens metalinguistic knowledge (knowledge of how languages work) and so makes further language learning easier. Full bilingualism (and/or multilingualism/plurilingualism) is therefore completely attainable and should be encouraged, not discouraged.

Language weeks and festivals:

Social cohesion in multicultural Aotearoa is also supported by initiatives that enable our diverse cultures and languages to be visible. Festivals such as Matariki, Pasifika, the Lantern Festival, Eid and Diwali are an opportunity for communities to celebrate and share their culture in ways that are easily accessible. The steadily increasing number of language weeks is another valuable way to celebrate our diversity.

Leadership and recognition:

Official recognition and use of multiple languages is an important way for migrants to feel welcome and valued in Aotearoa. Community members often talk about what it means to them when they hear a politician or other leader saying a greeting in their language. Bilingual/multilingual signage, government websites in multiple languages, availability of electronic and print media in community languages, and libraries displaying books in

languages other than English are other useful ways to give recognition to people's culture and language. More visibility for our national languages – te reo Māori and NZSL – also shows respect and openness to diversity.

Supporting people to have the knowledge and skills they need to participate

Support for Bilingual Education:

One of the most effective ways to ensure that diverse children and young people achieve to their full potential in education would be to increase the availability and resourcing for Bilingual Education. Evidence shows that learning in and through a first or heritage language results in improved long-term learning outcomes in both the heritage language and English, yet there is very limited support for immersion or bilingual education in languages other than Te Reo Māori, and insufficient support even for that. ERO¹ identified that only 58% of the Auckland schools surveyed intentionally promoted learning by using children's home language or cultural lens.

The greatest benefits of bilingual learning are seen when children have access to quality learning through the language for at least six years. This means that ideally, children need to be able to transition from a bilingual or immersion ECE into a school offering bilingual or immersion learning in the same language. However, the number of centres providing learning through languages other than English are significantly greater in early childhood than in schooling. This creates an issue for families wanting their children to continue in bilingual or immersion learning on transition to school. This issue is exacerbated by the geographical locations of language-based ECE in relation to kura or bilingual units in schools. The transition issue is exacerbated by the narrow goals of the New Zealand Curriculum in contrast to the broad goals of Te Whāriki which recognise language and culture more effectively.

We welcome government's recent announcements of increased support for kura and of the first-ever central funding to Pasifika Bilingual Education. These are valuable steps but will require ongoing commitment and investment.

Even where bilingual or immersion education is not possible (for example because there are only a few speakers of a particular language in a community), schools and ECEs can do a great deal to enable children to use their first or heritage language in their learning.

Aotearoa New Zealand's ethnic communities provide an important source of expert speakers of many different languages. Their skills are a significant resource for Aotearoa New Zealand educationally, socially and economically. Community education (such as after-school or weekend language classes for children) plays an important role in developing and maintaining language skills within communities. At the same time, community education is also an important setting for adults choosing to learn an additional language or strengthen their heritage language.

Recommendations:

- Greater support for Māori and Pasifika students to more equitably access education, through greater support of bilingual and immersion education in te reo Māori and in the main Pasifika languages.
- That guidance and support be given to ECEs and schools to enable them to use community expertise to provide for first language maintenance and for recognition of learners' cultures and identities in the classroom, for their diverse learners.

¹ Education Review Office (2018). *Responding to Language Diversity in Auckland*, April 2018, page 47

Encouraging first language at home:

There is extensive evidence on the value of a strong first language to support additional language learning. Being fully fluent in more than one language has benefits for intercultural communication and has also been shown to support further language learning and more flexible thinking.

Families are best advised to speak their strongest language (usually their first language) at home because this supports language maintenance and provides the best possible environment for children's language development and for their wider learning. This is an important message for government and education leaders to emphasise. Many families erroneously see their heritage language as an impediment to their children's English-medium education, whereas the evidence shows that fluency in a heritage language enhances educational success².

English language provision for migrants:

While there are English language requirements for some visa categories, most migrants need support to build the level of English language skill they need to fully participate in society and to gain work that aligns with the other skills they bring.

Current funding for English language provision is reasonable for refugees and for those with residency, but it does not cover migrants with other visa categories, nor does it provide sufficiently for family members of principal visa holders. This means that some people can be in Aotearoa for years before they have the opportunity to access subsidised English language support. If access to English support was widened, this would enable migrants and their families to settle more quickly, participate in their community, better support their children's learning and participation, and make better use of their skills.

Recommendation:

- Review eligibility rules for subsidised English language support to include some support for migrants who do not yet have residence.

Supporting people to have a voice and feel heard

Addressing language barriers to participation

Many migrants struggle to fully engage in their community and in the wider social, economic and political life of Aotearoa, because things here work so differently from the way they work where migrants may have come from, and because of the significant language barriers they face in trying to engage in complex things such as elections or consultations.

Government information (including election information) is now available in a range of languages, though this needs to be further extended. Some departments are also using non-standard methods for consultations, such as holding meetings in communities, with translators and interpreters available. There is scope for more innovation on better ways to support diverse groups to have their say on all the issues that affect them. This is not just a practical issue; enabling input in multiple languages and modalities also communicates that diverse communities' views are welcome.

Language barriers don't only apply to migrants. Speakers of NZSL also face barriers in having their voice heard. The New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 permits the use of NZSL in legal proceedings, facilitates competency standards for its interpretation and guides

² May, S., Hill, R., & Tiakiwai, S. (2004). *Bilingual/immersion education: indicators of good practice*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.

government departments in its promotion and use. NZSL interpreters are becoming more common alongside official announcements, but this is still not universal. To date, there has been little promotion or support for teaching and learning New Zealand Sign Language in the community, in schools or in initial teacher education.

Reducing inequality and improving opportunities for people by providing support and resources

The role of government:

We would like to see greater emphasis on the role of government to support language acquisition and maintenance, for social cohesion. Government has a clear legal obligation to support te reo Māori, under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. There are also formal government obligations to NZSL as a national language; and to the languages of Realm New Zealand (Vagahau Niue, Te Reo Kuki Airani and Gagana Tokelau).

More broadly, government has a role alongside community to support the maintenance, learning, celebration and use of other languages spoken in Aotearoa, because of the contribution this makes towards identity, belonging, inclusion, participation and recognition, and thus to social cohesion. Although the World Happiness Reports do not directly measure multilingualism, it is notable that support for and encouragement of multilingualism correlates positively with “Happiness” rankings.³

Research shows that without some level of government support, usually through education, migrant communities across the world generally lose their language within three generations. This is a tragic loss to wellbeing for the communities concerned and also a loss of skills to the nation.

Employment equity:

Many of the groups that are currently over-represented in unemployment and low-wage statistics (Māori, Pasifika and recent migrants) have language skills that could contribute significant value to employers, but these skills are often not recognised as valuable by the people themselves or by employers.

Employers need awareness-raising on the value language skills could add to their business, and skill-building on how to better recruit for, and gain value from, the language skills of their employees.

As mentioned earlier there is also an urgent need to support migrants to build strong oral and written English skills so they can engage in the workplace and gain employment at a level that befits their qualifications and prior experience.

We have included a list of references on the role of language in settlement for migrants, including economic aspects of settlement, in Appendix Two.

Access to services:

Even for migrants with good English skills, negotiating healthcare, housing or justice situations in their second (third/fourth) language is challenging. Interpreters are theoretically available (in person or by phone), but it is all too common, even in large hospitals, for migrant parents to end up relying on their New Zealand-educated son or daughter to translate highly technical and private medical information. This is potentially dangerous and leads to significant inequities in healthcare and other social services.

³ <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2020/>

The potential role of a National Languages Policy

ALSWG sees several points where a well-crafted National Language Policy would directly support the community involvement in fostering social inclusion recommended by the Royal Commission and would help to refine the principles and proposals discussed in SINZ.

Research demonstrates that **harnessing the economic and social benefits** of languages will result in:

- a. Improved student achievement at school
- b. Reduced barriers to trade and economic development
- c. Greater integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees
- d. Status, support and protection for our languages and cultures
- e. Better career and employment prospects for our young people in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas
- f. Enhanced social cohesion and harmony
- g. Reduced barriers to civic engagement and accessing public services

Aotearoa New Zealand's increasing language diversity is a potential strength for social cohesion (and also for identity, trade, tourism, education achievement and intercultural understanding). However, lack of central government recognition and support has led to underutilization of this valuable resource.

There is an opportunity for government to move forward towards a National Language Policy, following the recommendation of the Education and Workforce Committee to develop a national strategy for languages in education, instead of proceeding with the Education (Strengthening Second Language Learning in Primary and Intermediate Schools) Amendment Bill. Such a national strategy could be a first step towards a broader National Languages Policy.

A National Languages Policy would provide a coherent platform to support language learning, maintenance, celebration and use across government agencies and sectors, in order to harness the benefits of a multilingual Aotearoa New Zealand.

It would specifically address and be underpinned by Te Reo Māori as our nation's indigenous language, and also encompass official recognition and support for NZSL and the Realm languages (Te Reo Kuki Airani, Vagahau Niue and Gagana Tokelau), for the other major Pacific languages spoken in Aotearoa (Gagana Samoa and Lea Faka-Tonga) and for the many community languages of our nation.

It would also provide for greater access to English as a second language teaching, interpreting and translation services, language diversity in government communications and broadcasting, and maintaining heritage languages within families and communities.

The above comments draw on our collective expertise and on the community-based work that underpins [Ngā Reo O Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Languages Strategy](#) (2015, COMET Auckland).

[Ngā Reo O Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Languages Strategy Report](#) is the closest to a blueprint for a National Languages Strategy and ALSWG would welcome the opportunity to develop and expand our Auckland-based work. We believe they can easily scale up to have national scope.

Our Strategy expresses a **Vision** for Auckland: That by 2040 Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland enjoys the full social, cultural, spiritual and economic benefits of our many living languages.

The **Strategies** for achieving this Vision require us to:

- a. **Value** all the languages spoken here
- b. **Maintain** all the languages spoken here
- c. **Learn** our own and each other's languages
- d. **Use** our many languages to promote our communities' social, cultural, spiritual and economic wellbeing in a wide range of social domains.

This Vision and the Strategies for achieving it require commitment to language equality – tolerance and openness to the use of a wide range of languages in varied social domains, support for the maintenance and development of language skills throughout society, treating languages and multilingualism as a skill and an asset of benefit to the individual and enriching society as a whole.

Recommendation:

- Based on advice from Professor Lo Bianco (University of Melbourne, principal author of the Australian National Languages Policy) and others, the first step towards a national languages policy would be to conduct an independent consultation on the issues a languages policy would need to address. Professor Lo Bianco has previously indicated that he would welcome an opportunity to assist Government on this matter.

Appendix One: Auckland Languages Strategy Group

The Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland Languages Strategy Group is an unaffiliated working group drawing on expertise and interest in the status and use of languages in New Zealand, and in Auckland in particular. The group is convened by COMET Auckland (an education and skills trust linked to Auckland Council) and includes members from a wide range of language-related organisations.

Vision

A multilingual Auckland that benefits socially, culturally and economically from an increasing number of Aucklanders knowing, respecting and speaking more than one language.

Core Messages

- Te reo Māori first – Aotearoa’s indigenous language
- NZSL – our other national language
- Importance of easy access to English
- Pasifika languages especially the Realm languages
- Value of all languages especially community and family languages
- Importance of language and culture – social cohesion, identity, cognitive, trade/tourism (our language, our culture, our identity)
- Support means more than education – recognition in the Civic domain, public celebration, translation/interpreting, maintenance, access to information and services, opportunities to use...

We are calling for:

- Every child to learn Te Reo Māori - core curriculum from year 1
- Also English and their heritage language or community language of their choice
- A plan to make those possible over time
- Support recognition of Pasifika languages
- Develop a National Languages Policy
- Start with a consultation

Achievements to date:

- **Developing *Ngā Reo o Tāmaki Makaurau: Auckland Languages Strategy***, which was launched in November 2015, with the goal that by 2040 Tāmaki Makaurau enjoys the full economic, social and cultural benefits of our many living languages.
- **Co-hosting a visit in August 2017 by Professor Joseph Lo Bianco**, University of Melbourne, principal author of the Australian National Languages Policy. The NZ visit was in partnership with the Royal Society, AUT and Victoria University of Wellington. Professor Lo Bianco spoke at three public meetings and met with senior officials from a range of government departments to outline the value a national languages policy and to advise on a process towards developing such a policy.
- **Preparing a Briefing to the Incoming Ministers on language issues in Aotearoa**, in November 2017. The briefing was sent to five ministers with responsibilities closely related to language diversity, with copies to a further 20 ministers and to key national organisations working in the language space.
- **Publishing a *Strategy for Languages in Education***, released in August 2018, outlining the need for a planned approach to language provision, including teacher workforce development, in order to enable all children in Aotearoa to learn te reo

Māori from year 1 as of right, and to be supported to maintain and use their own heritage language, and/or to learn another language of their choice.

- **Submissions and representations** on the Education (Strengthening Second Language Learning in Primary and Intermediate Schools) Amendment Bill and the Māori Language (Te Reo Māori) Bill 2014; and support to partner groups for advice to MOE on reviewing and delivering the current Learning Languages Policy and on Pasifika Bilingual Education; and for submissions on the need for more support in education for the Hindi language; and the impact of the IELTS and equivalent requirements for initial teacher education (ITE) on recruitment of community language speakers and experts and educators in ECEs and schools.
- **Surveying language organisations** to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the sector supporting language learning, maintenance, translation, interpreting and use in Aotearoa. The results of the survey will be shared at the CESOL conference in October 2021 and published in early 2022.

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Appendix Two: Some useful references on the role of language in migrant settlement

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