**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF TESOL ASSOCIATIONS ADVICE TO NSRA REFORM TASKFORCE ON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESTRUCTURE**

**BACKGROUND:**

At a consultation meeting between ACTA and officials from the NSRA Reform Taskforce,National Schools Reform Division on 20 February 2024, a restructure involving EAL/D education was flagged. It was anticipated that literacy, languages and EALD education would be established within the Commonwealth Department of Education under a single Social Cohesion and Languages team with a new director, and that the new director would reach out to ACTA to discuss opportunities in the EALD and the new First Nations policy space.

From 1986 until 1997, the Commonwealth Department of Education administered the New Arrivals and General Support components of a national English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. In 1997, the General Support component became a broadbanded literacy program. In 2008, the ESL New Arrivals Program was disbanded and responsibility for English tuition for newly arrived students was devolved to state and territory education systems. Since then, the Commonwealth Government has played no role in Australia’s front-line educational response to the immediate and longer-term English learning needs of migrant and refugee students in schools. Over this period, EAL/D programs in Australian schools have disintegrated under flexible needs-based funding via one-line global budgets within state and territory school autonomy programs.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In response to this widespread program disintegration, ACTA issued a *National Roadmap for EAL/D Education in Schools* in 2022*.* The Roadmap is a national ‘rebuilding’ reform plan identifying twelve strategic actions that address key national policy issues impacting all aspects of EAL/D education, aligned with the Reform Directions and National Policy Initiatives in *National Schools Reform Agreement.[[2]](#footnote-2)* The issues identified in the *Roadmap* remain unresolved and the actions addressing them are still relevant.

At the meeting, Reform Taskforce officials indicated that there was additional scope for Commonwealth action and national leadership in EAL/D education outside the agreements, particularly in relation to funding initiatives and data transparency and accountability. It was noted that the Minister was keen to pursue greater transparency around both allocations and expenditure, both within and outside the agreement, as well as First nations stakeholder accountability. In this context, ACTA submits this proposal for discussion with the new Director and the Minister’s consideration.

**PROPOSAL:**

ACTA welcomes the reestablishment of an EAL/D education administrative role within the Commonwealth Department of Education but believes that the nature and scale of the work required for any essential national reform of EAL/D education cannot be progressed by an embedded function on a part-time basis.

If the Government is committed to national EAL/D education reform, a stand-alone national unit is needed to plan, coordinate, implement and report on these reforms, staffed by a team with EAL/D policy and program expertise around State and Territory education system support for refugee, migrant and Indigenous EAL/D learners in urban, regional and remote settings.

**COMMENT:**

EAL/D education in Australia is now at a crucial crossroad. Its future viability as a national access and equity program now relies on urgent Commonwealth intervention and leadership of a national EAL/D education reform agenda along the lines outlined in ACTA’s *National Roadmap for EAL/D Education in Schools* above. The Department restructure provides an opportunity for government to consider commitment to this agenda.

In addition to the actions outlined in the *Roadmap*, a related and substantial program of EAL/D specific work arises from implementation of the Government’s education reform agenda. This includes:

* implementing *Improving Outcomes for All*Report Recommendation 5c to identify and define EAL/D learners as a priority equity cohort through development of a national EAL/D proficiency measure and related development of data collection and reporting capability;
* working with State and Territory Governments to improve transparency and accountability in education systems’ allocation and use of earmarked English language proficiency and other funding to improve EAL/D students’ English learning outcomes;[[3]](#footnote-3)
* working with state and territory education systems to improve identification of EAL/D need, targeted resource allocation, EAL/D program delivery and reporting on EAL/D learner achievement and progress;[[4]](#footnote-4)
* working with First Nations Division and First Nations Languages Program and other Indigenous stakeholders to ensure identification of and targeted support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with EAL/D learning needs;[[5]](#footnote-5)
* working with AITSL to include standards in the Australian Professional Teaching Standards specifically related to teaching EAL/D learners, and with state and territory teacher regulation authorities in complying with these revised Standards;[[6]](#footnote-6)
* working with State and Territory Governments to ensure the recruitment, supply and retention of specialist trained EAL/D teachers through the *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan;*[[7]](#footnote-7)
* working with higher education institutions to ensure that implementation of the *Australian Universities Accord* addresses the skill development and credentialling for all teachers working in culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood, school and adult education settings, including specialist teachers in the areas of TESOL and LOTE teaching and bilingual education;[[8]](#footnote-8)
* working with teacher education institutions to ensure implementation of the *Next Steps: Report of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review* report prepares initial teacher education (ITE) students to be effective specialist EAL/D teachers and mainstream teachers of EAL/D learners;[[9]](#footnote-9)
* coordination and consultation with relevant internal and external EAL/D education stakeholders on the above reforms.

ACTA also believes it is time for the Commonwealth to resume national responsibility for the on-arrival English learning needs of migrant and refugee students in schools by reestablishing a nationally funded EAL/D New Arrivals Program. Continuation of the current devolved arrangement are unsustainable as they perpetuate the disconnect between EALD provision and Australia’s ongoing migration and humanitarian programs and hinder Australian education systems’ ability to proactively respond to the 800,000 EAL/D learners projected to be enrolled in schools over the next four years as a result of immigration.[[10]](#footnote-10) Given growing concerns about Indigenous students with EAL/D learning needs, the Commonwealth should also consider resuming responsibility for extending intensive English provision to Indigenous students who require it.

The term ‘EAL/D education’ used in this briefing reflects the systemic nature of EAL/D provision as a complete education infrastructure comprised of many interconnecting parts, each contributing to the effective functioning of the EAL/D system as a whole. The national policy vacuum in the EAL/D space over the last two decades has led to the substantial erosion of system supports that underpin the health and effectiveness of EAL/D education. Government’s efforts to create a better and fairer Australian education system therefore need to be applied to EAL/D education as a whole and together with its system supports. The attached draft *Australian Performance Framework for EALD education* shows EAL/D education as a comprehensive education system with its essential supporting elements. It provides a scheme of the kind of comprehensive national performance framework needed to drive measurable and transparent improvements in education systems’ EAL/D provision over the life of the NSRA and beyond.

1. For how flexible school-based resource management has decimated the demand for EAL/D teachers, see section 5 of [Submission DR124 - Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) - National School Reform Agreement - Commissioned study (pc.gov.au)](https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/349102/subdr124-school-agreement.pdf). See also Submission 108 to the 2017 Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes at [Submissions – Parliament of Australia (aph.gov.au)](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Migration/settlementoutcomes/Submissions) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf (tesol.org.au)](https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Re the ELP loading and lack of accountability on its use, see Actions 1 and 11 in [Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf (tesol.org.au)](https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf)

ACTA’s submission to the Productivity Commission NSRA Review. [Submission DR124 - Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) - National School Reform Agreement - Commissioned study (pc.gov.au)](https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/349102/subdr124-school-agreement.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ACTA’s submission to the Productivity Commission NSRA Review provided a detailed analysis of the key role of school leadership in creating a positive learning environment for EAL/D learners: see section 6 of [Submission DR124 - Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) - National School Reform Agreement - Commissioned study (pc.gov.au)](https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/349102/subdr124-school-agreement.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For lack of data and data collection targets on EAL/D learning in the Closing the Gap Agreement, the siloing of Indigenous languages and the failure to consider English language learning needs in the Closing the Gap Agreement, see [Submission 11 - Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) - Closing the Gap Review - Commissioned study (pc.gov.au)](https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/352461/sub011-closing-the-gap-review.pdf) and [Submission DR179 - Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) - Indigenous Evaluation Strategy - Project (pc.gov.au)](https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/257173/subdr179-indigenous-evaluation.pdf). Re what can be achieved in bilingual/bicultural/biliteracy programs for Indigenous EAL/D learners, see Problem 4 in 2021/22 see [ATESOL-NT-Supplementary-Submission-to-the-Inquiry-into-Adult-Literacy-and-its-Importance.pdf (atesolnt.org.au)](https://atesolnt.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ATESOL-NT-Supplementary-Submission-to-the-Inquiry-into-Adult-Literacy-and-its-Importance.pdf). Re a coherent approach to Indigenous languages and learning English, see [ACTA's Response to First Languages Australia paper Indigenous Languages Priorities 21 April 2023 - ATESOL NT](https://atesolnt.org.au/news_and_views/actas-response-to-first-languages-australia-paper-indigenous-languages-priorities-21-april-2023/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Re ATISL Standards, mandatory EAL/D content in ITE, specialist EAL/D qualifications and on-going teacher development, see Actions 5, 6 & 7 in [Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf (tesol.org.au)](https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Roadmap-for-English-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-in-schools-ACTA-May-2022.pdf) and sections 2.1

and 2.2 in ACTA-final-submission-Quality-Initial-Teacher-EducationReview.pdf (tesol.org.au) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For a comprehensive coverage of EAL/D teacher supply issues, see section 5 of [Submission DR124 - Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) - National School Reform Agreement - Commissioned study (pc.gov.au)](https://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/349102/subdr124-school-agreement.pdf) See also [ACTA-submission-National-Teacher-Workforce-Action-Plan-final.pdf (tesol.org.au)](https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ACTA-submission-National-Teacher-Workforce-Action-Plan-final.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Re Teacher Education in the Higher Education Accord, see: [AUA\_tranche3\_Australian Council of TESOL Associations.pdf (education.gov.au)](https://www.education.gov.au/system/files/documents/submission-file/2023-04/AUA_tranche3_Australian%20Council%20of%20TESOL%20Associations.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For a comprehensive coverage of issues in initial teacher education relating to EAL/D learners, see 2023 [ACTA-submission-on-the-Teacher-Education-Expert-Panel-Discussion-Paper.pdf (tesol.org.au)](https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ACTA-submission-on-the-Teacher-Education-Expert-Panel-Discussion-Paper.pdf). See also 2021 [ACTA-final-submission-Quality-Initial-Teacher-Education-Review.pdf (tesol.org.au)](https://tesol.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ACTA-final-submission-Quality-Initial-Teacher-Education-Review.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ACTA identified that there were approximately 600,000 EAL/D learners in Australian schools. See [2021 October -How many English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) Learners are there in Australian Schools? – Australian Council of TESOL Associations](https://tesol.org.au/how-many-english-as-an-additional-language-or-dialect-eal-d-learners-are-there-in-australian-schools/). Despite a notable decline in EAL/D student numbers in 2020 during COVID, the growth trend has resumed. Based on these trends, an additional 200,000 EAL/D learners are projected to be in schools over the next four years. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)