



17th November 2018

The Honourable Mr. John Gardner
Minister for Education
GPO BOX 1563
Adelaide SA 5001

Dear Minister

My name is Stella Emberson and I am the President of SA TESOL, the State association for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. SA TESOL is the association representing EALD teachers across all sectors and systems. The association has members from Independent and Catholic schools and colleges, TAFE, Universities as well as members from Department schools and colleges. The association is a member of The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA). I am writing to ask you about changes to the Department's restructuring and support of EALD teachers and learners.

I am now retired but when I worked for the Department I was employed as a tutor for the *ESL in the Mainstream* (later to be known as *Teaching ESL Students in Mainstream classes* or *TESMC*) for over ten years and I was an EALD Consultant for four years from 2010 to 2013. During those times I worked closely with the New Arrivals Manager and the Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) as well as the other seven EALD Consultants and the EALD Program Manager. I also created a number of resources for schools and teachers.

So it is with concern that I learnt there is now only one EALD Consultant who works with the Curriculum team, alongside the New Arrivals Manager and that the CLOs and data managers are working in a separate team in a different location. The previous President of SA TESOL association, Teresa Howie, wrote to Rick Perse in 2016 indicating the association's interest in consulting with the Department during an EALD Program review. A reply from Susan Cameron indicated that the review in late 2016 was a functional review of the operations to determine an alignment of the EALD Program within the new structure of the Learning Improvement Division. In the letter Susan Cameron says that a draft report with recommendations has been presented to her and that she and her team will prepare a 'next steps' and recommendations report which will be available for wide consultation and will provide an opportunity for SA TESOL and its members to provide feedback. I apologise that the association did not make further enquiries but both Teresa and I were heavily involved in the planning of the ACTA International Conference that occurred in Adelaide in October of this year at The Adelaide convention Centre. However concern from members and the recent article in the Advertiser (13/11/18) about lack of consultation with the Somali Community have alerted us to decisions that have not appeared to have had wide consultation. Logistically and financially there may be good arguments for this re-structuring but I am not aware that the association was given any opportunity to respond to these changes before they were put in place.

It has been indicated to me that the provision of knowledgeable and appropriate EALD intervention in schools will now be at risk because of the division of the team. I remember from my year of working in Central office how important my communication and conversations were with the EALD Data Manager and the EALD Administration Officer in following up appropriate funding to individuals and schools, based on the deployment of the Language and Literacy Levels assessment of learners. The Language and Literacy Levels, which are also used by Catholic and Independent schools, give far more accuracy and understanding to an EALD learner's needs than the NAPLAN results and failure to use this document efficiently seems likely with this further division of the team. The Language and Literacy Levels document is used to determine a student's level for SACE and their eligibility for various English courses. Without proper understanding of the Levels a student could be wrongly counselled into a stage 1 or stage 2 SACE pathway which could then restrict their learning and the completion of their year 11 or year 12 studies leading to 'drop out'. In addition all New Arrival students enter government schools initially and cuts to services and personnel could further reduce the accuracy of assessing a learner's educational pathway and language needs. If they then move to Catholic or Independent schools without proper assessment their failure to thrive in their new educational setting could take a set-back. I fail to see any clarity about what this new structure will achieve. I do not feel we have had a chance to talk out these concerns, to hear the Department's viewpoint and decision for this restructuring.

The recent ACTA International TESOL Conference *English Language Learning in a Mobile World* was an enormous success judging by the feedback across all sectors, systems and universities here and overseas. While I am keen to build on this success to grow the SA TESOL association the responsibility in providing professional learning in EALD cannot fall completely to the association as expressed in ACTA's recent **National Strategy for Language in Education and Training**. This document has been shared with Federal Government and the Labour Party and was 'launched' at the recent ACTA International Conference.

Teaching and learning English, in the context of the increasingly diverse geographic, cultural, social, educational and language backgrounds of our students, is a skilled job requiring ongoing learning for the educator/teacher. In the Strategy document the author and president of ACTA Dr. Michael Michel states that

"Needs based funding to support English language learning needs is not consistently, reaching and benefitting the EALD target group. School autonomy and flexible funding policies allow funding to be diverted away from this group, resulting in the erosion of specialist EALD programs in schools and the loss of funding, leadership, staffing and expertise in Intensive English Centres. At the same time, State/Territory system representatives are downsizing or abolishing administrative units and personnel directly responsible for supporting and monitoring EALD students' English learning." (page 7 Objective/action 4)

Furthermore Michel states

"On-going professional learning in this area is no longer offered by systems or is inconsistent, sporadic and dependent on local ACTA affiliates run by volunteers and occasional other institutions." (page 7 Objective/action 4)

With the increased emphasis on school based management and decision-making there is an even more pressing need for the Department to provide schools with effective support for both executive and teachers in order for them to develop English language planning, programs and evaluation. The push for language education and English language teaching to speakers of other languages was well engaged through policies of the 1980s but this broad vision for the future of all Australian learners is being replaced

by a single focus vision on English language and literacy testing. The association believes the Department should be *'developing strong professional learning support programs for all staff including administrators with opportunities for peer and expert coaching and collegial sharing'* (page 8 objective/action 5).

The SA TESOL association continues to advocate for and promote the benefits of bilingual education so we question why the work of Community Liaison Officers in the Department is separated from the working environment of the two remaining EALD leaders. How will information be shared when an effective and specialist team is broken up? How will communication between these two important arms of the EALD program be carried out?

While it appears highly beneficial to have an EALD specialist and Intensive English Language Program Manager working with the curriculum team, the association feels this could be a further erosion of the provision of specialist and differentiated pedagogy delivery to address the learning needs of EALD students. We would like to know if a review of the re-structuring will take place at the end of 2019 and what contingency plans are in place if the review shows the learning needs of EALD students are not met and if the qualified support and professional development of staff, both executive and teaching staff, fails to occur.

We look forward to engaging in productive discussions about the future of the EALD program within the Department of Education and would ask for your direction and support in this matter.

Sincerely



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SA TESOL President 2018-2019

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