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Review of Language Aide Program & Multilingual Telephone Line

July 2017

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners And Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Communities in Darebin

Darebin City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land we now call Darebin and pays respect to their Elders, past, present and future.

We pay respect to all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Darebin.

We recognise and pay tribute to the diverse culture, resilience and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We acknowledge the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and the right to self-determination in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect.

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Background & Rationale

Established in March 2000, the Language Aide Program utilises the skills of bilingual Council staff to provide communication assistance to residents and other relevant customers and stakeholders. The purpose of the Language Aide program is to facilitate equal access and participation in Council services and programs by people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

An effective strategy for interacting with customers from a spectrum of cultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds is an essential component of providing equal access to services for community members who have a low proficiency in English. It is the understanding that people from different cultural groups need support to interact and develop new social connections that forms the basis of the Language Aide program.

The discipline of translating and interpreting allows bilingual language speakers to act as mediators and bridges between the cultures in our community. It also enables us as a community to operate cohesively within the context of a multicultural society.

The Language Aide Program is an important service which assists Council to achieve its commitment to a cohesive, included and engaged community. In 2016, a review of the Language Aide program was a key recommendation of the Customer Service Model Review. The recommendation required that the outcome of the review improve its functionality and overhaul face to face and phone data collection systems.

The provision of support via the Language Aide program is critical to customers who are unable or uncomfortable communicating in English and helps the community in the following ways:

- helping customers overcome complex service systems and rules;
- ensuring that services are provided at the same standard to all stakeholders from all backgrounds;
- ensuring legal requirements are met (e.g. obtaining informed consent);
- enhancing the quality of program and service delivery; and
- save on costs by delivering services in a more efficient, resource friendly and targeted approach.

Executive Summary

Darebin has an extraordinarily diverse community made of many non-English speaking residents. About 1 in 15 people in Darebin identify as having a low level of proficiency in English.

Most requests for language assistance result in the use of internal Language Aides, with around one-quarter of language support requests resulting in the use of professional interpreting services. Most interactions are over the phone with about one-quarter of requests coming from in-person interactions.

Having said that, it is clear that community requirements for the Language Aide Program are changing. The demographic of our population has shifted significantly since the inception of the service with a reduction in traditional language groups requiring support and an increase service to community members from alternate cultural groups. The shift is supported by data supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and our own internal data sources.

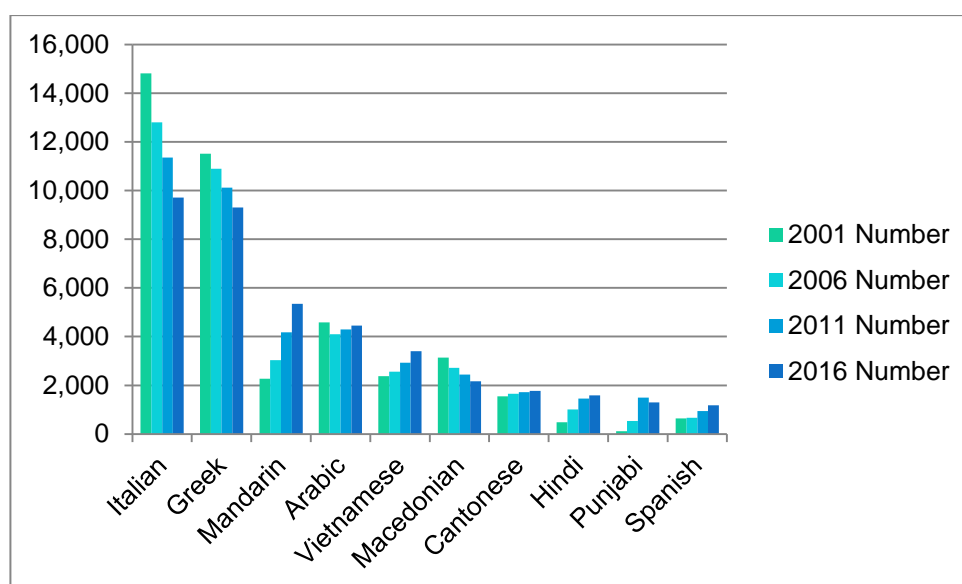


Figure 1 Language spoken at home – City of Darebin, ranked by size¹

It is with these facts and numbers in mind that we undertake this review. Many improvements have been suggested that include providing a clear skills-based pathway for staff who are Language Aides and building community awareness around the options for service by using modern communication techniques. Recommendations are listed at the end of this document on page 30.

Darebin has an extraordinarily diverse community made of many non-English speaking residents. About 1 in 15 people in Darebin identify as having a low level of proficiency in English. The low English proficiency group are mostly made up of Italian, Greek, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese and Macedonian speakers. Satisfaction among the non-English group is lower for face-to-face interactions. The abandonment rate is higher among calls to the multilingual queue (MTL), and wait times are longer. Non-English speakers are much less likely to contact Council than the general population.

In terms of Council's commitment to employee diversity, the program directly supports the implementation of Darebin's Diversity Capabilities Framework by calling on the skills of staff to aid in the routine work that Council does with its residents and other stakeholders. The pool of Language Aide support staff includes people from a diversity of age, gender and spoken language groups. As a result, Language Aides became champions of access and equity in their respective work areas and this is reflected by making Council more flexible and inclusive.

¹ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

Quantitative Analysis

A note about data integrity

A significant portion of this review is largely based on data extracted from internal systems and information provided by vendors and contractors. Unfortunately, as outlined in a chart further down this report - the data is unreliable. The data used and extracted has relied on the accurate, timely and consistent entry of minute detail into manual systems and there have been no previously outlined catch-all approaches to data collection. This has been recognised as a shortfall of both the service and a setback in conducting this review. A recommendation has been developed as a result that ensures the integrity and usefulness of quantitative data collection, interpretation and value specifically about the Language Aide program.

Summary:

Darebin has an extraordinarily diverse community made of many non-English speaking residents. About 1 in 15 people in Darebin identify as having a low level of proficiency in English. More non-English speaking residents are found in the Northern suburbs of Darebin. The low English proficiency group are mostly made up of Italian, Greek, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, Cantonese and Macedonian speakers. Internal Language Aides cover our Greek and Italian cohort of customers. Satisfaction among the non-English group is lower for face-to-face interactions, and users shower a lower level of satisfaction with the speed of the service. The abandonment rate is higher among calls to the multilingual queue (MTL), and wait times are longer. About half of the calls made to the MTL and conducted in English only. Non-English speakers are much less likely to contact Council than the general population.

Key findings:

- A group of 10,678 Darebin residents have identified themselves as having a low level of English proficiency. A total of 54,334 (37%) Darebin residents report speaking a language other than English at home.
- Low English Proficiency residents are about 20 times less likely to make a call to Council than the overall population.²
- The majority of this group speak Italian, Greek, Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese, Macedonian and Cantonese (in descending order of low-level English proficiency)
- Language Aides cover Greek and Italian well; with fewer instances of Language other than English (LOTE) contact requiring an external interpreter for language aide assistance.
- Macedonian and Vietnamese are well covered. Arabic, Mandarin and Cantonese result in around half of requests for assistance being referred to the external interpreter.
- North Darebin suburbs of Reservoir, Kingsbury and Bundoora have a much higher proportion of LOTE speakers than South Darebin suburbs of Northcote, Fairfield and Alphington.
- LOTE user satisfaction is unusually low for speed of service.
- LOTE user satisfaction is unusually low for face-to-face visitors compared to phone calls
- LOTE user satisfaction has marginally declined from 2014/15 to 2015/16.
- The time taken to manage a call to the MTL queue is, on average, more than double that of the Customer Service queue
- The abandonment rate is higher among calls to the multilingual queue (MTL), as are wait times.

² (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

Darebin Community

The data used in this report can be used to provide insight into the Darebin community. Data is from the 2016 and 2011 Censuses. This section also uses data from Darebin's Annual Community Survey.

2016 Census Data shows 59.2% of the Darebin population reported they are Australian born, and 40.7% reported they were born overseas. The overall population is growing faster than the rate of Australian-born residents: in 2011 60% of Darebin residents were born in Australia.

Top 5 Countries by Birth, 2016, 2011 Census of Darebin population:

Country of Birth	2016	2011
Italy	6,130	7,168
China (excludes SARS and Taiwan)	4,821	4,334
India	4,561	4,443
Greece	4,553	5,001
England	2,812	2,609

Table 1 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

A total of 54,334 (37%) Darebin residents report to speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home.

The following table shows Census data of the number of LOTE speakers by language and those who have identified as having low English proficiency (LEP). This data can be used to indicate which language groups are most likely to contact Council in a LOTE, or in general, have a need for Darebin services and information to be provided in a LOTE. The percentage can indicate which LOTE communities are more or less likely to have a firm grasp of English.

Language Spoken at home	2016; persons speaking language at home	Speaks English not well or not at all	% of LEP	2011; persons speaking language at home	Speaks English not well or not at all	% of LEP
Italian	9,708	1,944	20%	11,360	2,535	22%
Greek	9,301	2,119	23%	10,125	2,323	23%
Mandarin	5,345	1,823	34%	4,168	1,141	27%
Arabic	4,450	913	21%	4,298	808	19%
Vietnamese	3,401	874	26%	2,924	847	29%
Macedonian	2,170	421	19%	2,448	506	21%
Cantonese	1,771	590	33%	1,715	571	33%
Hindi	1,590	71	4%	1,461	80	5%
Punjabi	1,304	117	9%	1,489	85	6%
Spanish	1,181	121	10%	945	91	10%
Croatian	513	67	13%	529	96	18%
Chinese, not further defined	410	131	32%	404	127	31%
Turkish	373	41	11%	394	87	22%

Table 2 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

The table shows that 9,232 members of the Darebin community have a low level of English proficiency in the above-identified languages. This community is the target of the Language Aide program. A total group of 10,678 Darebin residents have identified themselves have a low level of English proficiency.

At 7.3% of the Darebin population, this is significantly higher than the Greater Melbourne average of 5.0%.

This data is supported by matching the data recorded via MTL phone calls handled by Language Aides and VITS in 2015/16.

Low English Proficiency Darebin residents vs. number of calls to the MTL queue, top 5 languages.

LOTE	Low English Proficiency	2016/17 Calls to MTL	2015/16 Calls to MTL
Greek	2,119	138	224
Italian	1,944	93	137
Mandarin	1,823	92	90
Arabic	913	33	54
Vietnamese	874	25	52

Table 3 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017) (Darebin City Council, 2017)

The ranking of languages with higher numbers of low English proficiency speakers matches those of the calls made to the MTL queue. However, the rate at which the low English proficiency (LEP) group is calling Council is very low when compared to the rate at which regular calls are made.

Rate of calls per resident per year	Darebin Population	Number of CS calls	Rate	Low-English population	Number of MTL calls	Rate
2016/17	146,719	149,203	101.7%	10,678	1,462	13.7%

Table 4 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017); (Darebin City Council, 2017)

The table above shows that in general, residents who identify as having low proficiency in English are far less likely to make a call to Council than the overall population.

After taking abandoned calls and calls made in English into account to MTL, only 478 calls were made to the MTL in a language other than English across 2016/17. This represents 4.4% of the population, or one call made for each 22 people identifying as having low English proficiency.

Factors affecting this may include:

- LEP group asking friends or family to contact Council on their behalf
- Preference to speak face-to-face
- Low awareness of Language Aide program and interpreting services. Low awareness is somewhat supported by results to the Annual Community Survey.

Responses to the 2016/17 Annual Community Survey show that 60.2% of Darebin residents are aware of Council’s multilingual telephone service (MTL). 55.7% of respondents who are from a multilingual household are aware of the MTL service.

Awareness of the multilingual service is particularly low among young adults in Darebin. Only 37.5% of respondents aged 20 to 35 years old reported they were aware of the MTL service.

The Annual Community Survey asked respondents how they had first found out about the service. Among the Multilingual household responses, 49.1% saw it in a publication, 24% heard from word of mouth and

14.7% were told by a Council staff. No respondents had first found out about the MTL service through the website.

To raise awareness about multilingual services, Council has recently undertaken radio advertising on SBS Radio and 3CR. As the advertising campaign has been undertaken over 12 weeks, results relating to the success of this campaign are not yet available at the time of this report.

Increasing the prominence of the multilingual services information on the Darebin website may also help to increase awareness.

2014 Household Survey data shows the geographical difference across Darebin in terms of language other than English (LOTE) spoken at home.

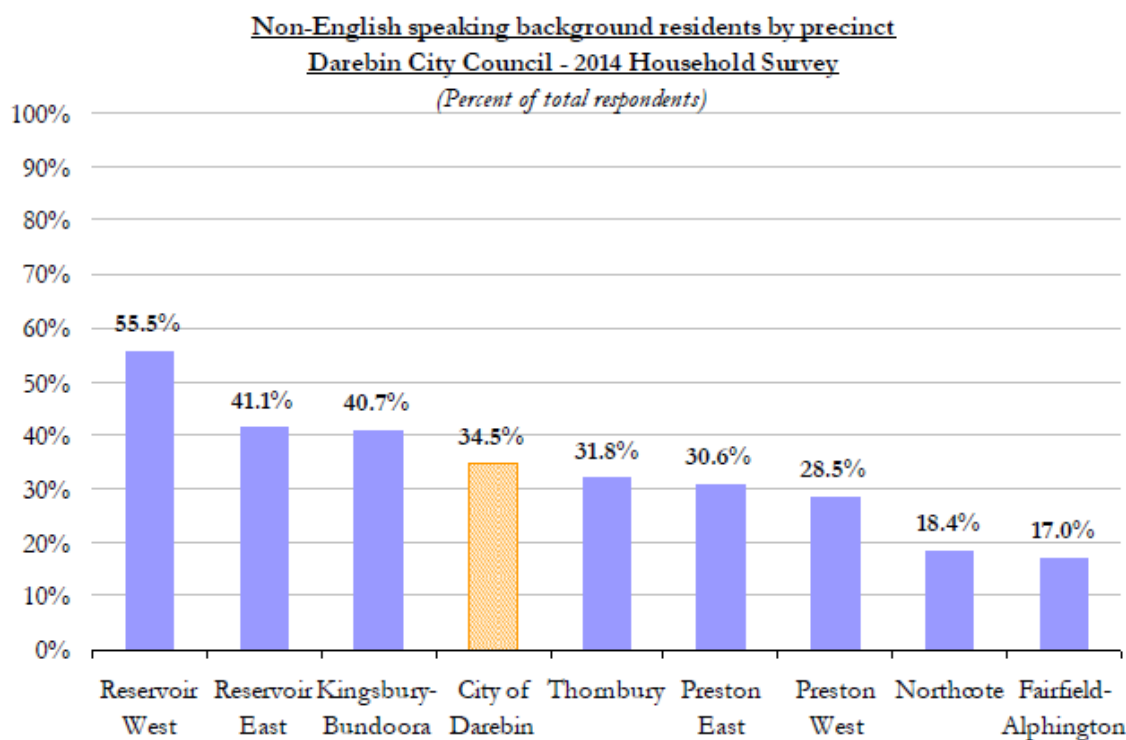


Figure 2 Household Survey Data 2014

Suburbs located in the Northern region of Darebin including Reservoir, Kingsbury and Bundoora have a much higher proportion of LOTE speakers than suburbs in the South of Darebin (Northcote, Fairfield and Alphington). Variation in the location of LOTE speaking residents should be considered in program delivery and communication methods.

Contact with Council

Data demonstrating contact with Council is partially incomplete or unreliable. System shortcomings have resulted in multiple methods of data capture with limitations outlined below. An attempt has been made to incorporate data from a range of sources to give a more complete picture.

Data in this section is sourced via:

Source of data	Strength	Limitations
Zeacom	Automatically captured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High proportion of calls made to Multilingual queue are for English only No data on calls made to regular Customer Service queue
Pathway Register	More accurate and complete data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relies on Language Aides manually entering the information Doesn't cover interactions not made with a Language Aide
Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)	Only partially complete – not used on a regular basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only covers some phone interactions
Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service (VITS)	Detailed and includes costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't cover most interactions

Table 5 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017), (Darebin City Council, 2017), (Victorian Translating and Interpreting Service (VITS), 2017)

Number of Non-English Interactions

The majority of non-English interactions are performed by Language Aides with 460 (72%) interactions in 2015/16. Over the same period, VITS conducted 155 (24%) interactions over the phone for Council and 28 (4%) interactions by an interpreter onsite. Similarly, 74% of all Language Aide interactions over 2016/17 were handled internally.

Over 2016/17, 57% of calls to the MTL queue were conducted in English rather than a LOTE. A similar trend has been seen in 2015/16, with 55% of calls to MTL completed in English only. This means there is room for improvement in communicating the intention of that specialised number for members of our community.

The data extracted via Zeacom does not align with Pathway data. Pathway data shows 330 telephone records were made in 2016/17. In the same period 244 instances of face-to-face contact were recorded. The discrepancy between the number of records in Pathway versus those recorded by Zeacom is due to manual entry. We can extract an assumable average by combining these records with qualitative information in order to establish usage trends.

Language Aide Coverage by Language

The table below shows the coverage managed for each language across 2015/16 and 2016/17. Italian has the largest number of calls at over 150 calls over 80% were handled by the Language Aide team. A similar rate is covered by Language Aides in Greek (80%) and Macedonian (70%). Other languages have a far lower ratio of calls handled by Language Aides, for example Language Aides handled 40% of Arabic calls, 42% of Mandarin calls and 50% of Cantonese calls.

	Number of LOTE phone calls handled by Language Aides		Number of LOTE calls handled by TIS and VITS		Portion covered by LA	
	2015/2016	2016/2017	2015/2016	2016/2017	2015/2016	2016/2017
Italian	97	67	17	17	85%	80%
Greek	91	102	15	39	86%	72%
Mandarin	42	61	52	42	45%	59%
Vietnamese	12	19	14	27	46%	41%
Arabic	26	25	31	24	46%	51%
Macedonian	14	22	5	11	74%	67%
Cantonese	14	6	7	5	67%	55%
Other	20	31	7	23	74%	23%
Total Calls (excluding English)	296	342	155	150	46%	51%

Table 7 (Darebin City Council, 2017)

On Site Interpreter Bookings

Much of the increase in the 2016/17 financial year in bookings is due to Darebin Libraries holding 'Tech Savvy Seniors' sessions for non-English speakers. This accounted for 26 bookings.

Onsite (face to face) interpreting	Number	Total Cost	Average Cost
2016/17	71	\$7518.95	\$105.90
2015/16	22	\$2844.38	\$129.29
2014/15	15	\$1901.68	\$126.78

Table 8 (Darebin City Council, 2017)

We can assume two factors contribute to the low number of face to face interpreter bookings:

1. Council officers are confident in their communications from members of the community from CALD backgrounds
2. Council officers are unaware of their responsibilities and ability to book interpreters for meetings with members of the community from CALD backgrounds

Staff survey results conclusively indicate that there is room for improvement for awareness, particularly regarding language services for translation and checking of written documents. The staff survey also asked questions regarding awareness of the different aspects of Council language-related support services.

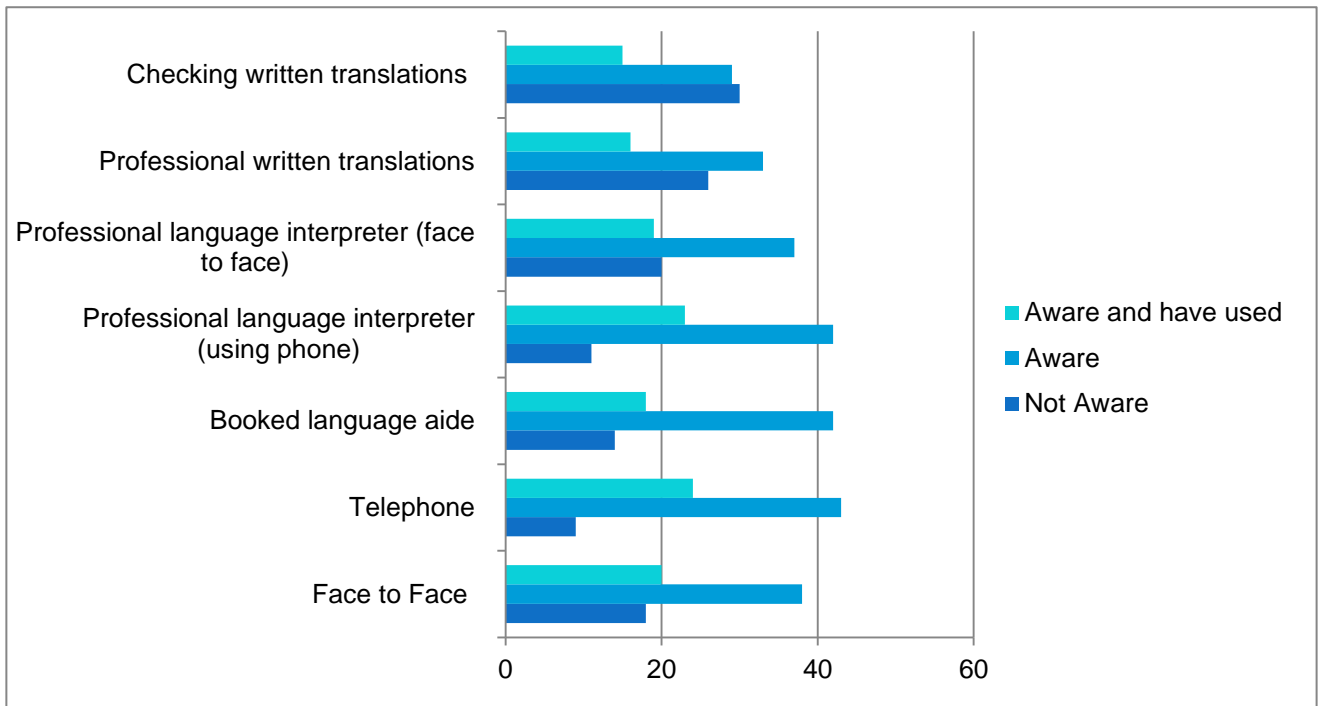


Figure 3 Staff Survey - Awareness of Language Services

The communications plan included in [appendix four](#) of this document clearly outlines new approaches to increasing staff awareness around regularly and confidently using Language Aide support officers and professional interpreting and translation services to enhance service delivery and provision.

User Satisfaction

Darebin’s quarterly Household Survey includes data on user satisfaction of Council services and information, which has been analysed to identify differences between residents with an English speaking background and those with a LOTE background.

For the 2015/16 survey, Darebin respondents to the question ‘Staff understand my language needs’ rated satisfaction (8.34) marginally but not measurably lower than the metropolitan Melbourne average (8.52).

The 2016/17 survey examined the importance of the MTL telephone service. Respondents rated the service as very important, with an average score of 8.55 out of 10. A majority of 94% of households rated the service as important or very important.

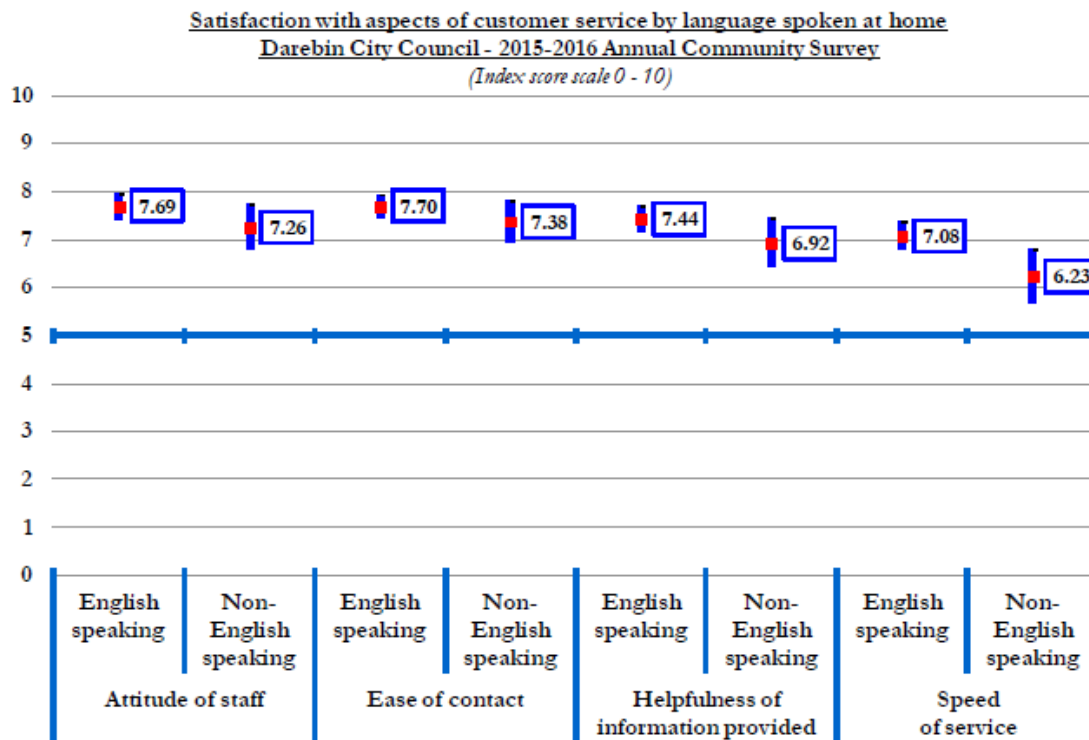


Figure 4 2015-16 Annual Community Survey

It is important to provide services and information to our LOTE community just as well, if not better, as those with an English speaking background.

Satisfaction with customer service was rated consistently lower among LOTE speakers. The most significant difference can be seen with the rating for 'Speed of service', this will be further expanded under the section below examining abandonment and wait times for calls to the MTL queue.

Data from the Community Survey indicates that there is a difference in satisfaction between interactions that are face-to-face or over the phone. Satisfaction is lower for face-to-face visitors, with a rating of 7.48 compared to phone calls, which was rated at 8.67 out of 10 (10 being highly satisfied). This may indicate that it is more difficult for Customer Service staff to contact a Language Aide or interpreter when responding to a customer in person or that the required language is not available in the moment the customer requires it and requires extra steps and intervention to achieve first contact resolution.

This may be due to a system limitation – the current set up of front counter desking does not allow a headset to be used by the CSO and a handset for the same call be provided to the customer while calling through to a Language Aide or professional interpreter.

Abandonment and Wait Times for the Multilingual Queue (MTL)

The abandonment rate of calls made to the Multilingual queue (MTL) is far higher than the abandonment rate of the normal Customer Service queue (CS).

Service levels are pre-determined using a specific calculation. Service levels used at Darebin are calculated using the method below:

$$\text{Service Level} = \frac{\text{calls answered within 20 seconds}}{\text{total calls answered} + \text{total calls abandoned}} \times 100$$

Our standard service level across all queues is to answer 75% calls within 20 seconds of the phone ringing. Using this formula the Multilingual (MTL) queue wait times are consistently higher compared to Customer Service queue.

Combined with data from the Quarterly Community Survey, this is an important issue to define and understand. As a result of these service levels, non-English speakers often have longer wait times and are more likely to abandon their phone call, and have a lower satisfaction with the speed of phone service as a result. This is clearly demonstrated by user satisfaction ratings acquired from the quarterly community survey compared with MTL data.

	Average Handling Time (minutes)		Average Wait time (minutes)		Average Speed of Answer (seconds)		Abandonment rate	
	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17
Multilingual Queue (8470)	3.24	4.01	1:52	1.26	0.47		31%	30%
Customer Service Queue (8888)	2.44	3.00	1.06	0.57	0.94	0.46	5.3%	4%

Budget

The cost of Language Aide Allowances is \$17651.20 for the 2016/2017. The budget is set at \$34,000 and this has not been increased or decreased for a number of years.

This is paid to 25 individual Language Aides, speaking 16 different languages. The allowance is paid in the full amount of \$896 to full time staff, and paid pro-rata to part time staff based on hours worked.

The VITS Fee Schedule puts \$22.55 as the fee for calls during business hours under 15 minutes. Each minute thereafter is charged at \$1.65. The average cost of using a staff member to manage calls to the multilingual line has been calculated to \$11.80 per 15 minute block. This is a clear cost saving of over 50%.

If every phone call to the MTL was diverted to VITS (as is the arrangement with many other authorities that do not have an internal Language Aide program) the cost to Council would rise to \$51,511 or greater (2271 total calls made to MTL in 2015/16).

This would be in addition to 205 face-to-face interactions that would need to be referred to VITS, and the onsite bookings. Overall cost would be \$58,978.

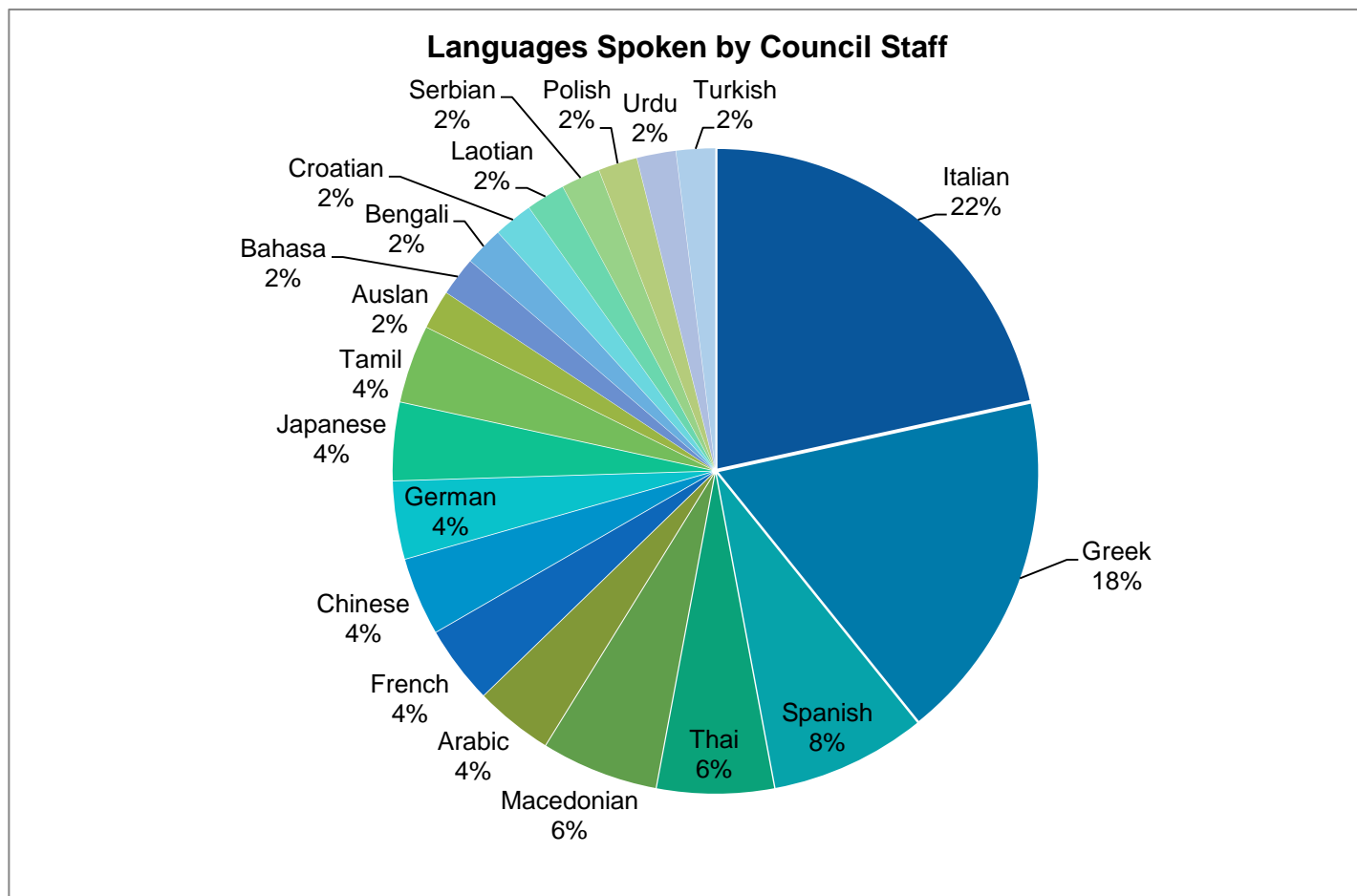
VITS and TIS National's registered interpreters have expertise in 170 languages and dialects.³ This provides us with ample support for the 138 languages identified by residents of Darebin which fall outside the parameters of support provided within the Language Aide program.

Staff Survey

³ (Australian National Audit Office, 2015)

Darebin Staff were sent a survey about the Language Aide program. 81 responses were received which equates to around 10% of the permanent staff pool. 54.3% of respondents reported that they speak a language other than English.

20 different languages are spoken by Darebin staff who responded to the survey. Please see the chart below for languages spoken:



Staff Survey Key Findings

- 32.6% of respondents who reported they speak a language other than English also said they speak this as their main language at home.
- 40.5% of respondents who reported they speak a language other than English have 'Intermediate fluency'. This is termed as vocabulary that is centred around everyday conversations and social interactions, whereas 52.4% have 'Advanced fluency' - vocabulary that includes ability to describe complex social, legal and abstract terms, and formal interactions.
- 86% of respondents had informal experience assisting others in a language other than English language. 23.8% had completed formal training in that language. 46.5% were aware about formal interpreting and translating accreditations.
- 62.8% of respondents said they are interested in becoming a language aide. 24 written responses were received to the question 'Why would you be interested in becoming a language aide?' A large majority of 75% of these responses mentioned helping or supporting the community in some way as a reason to be a language aide. 3 responses specifically mentioned the difficulty in non-English speaking residents in accessing Council information. 2 responses mentioned the benefit of the allowance, as did 2 responses for the issue of gaining practice in the language, and one response mentioned the benefit for career development.

- 15 responses were received for the question 'Why wouldn't you be interested in becoming a language aide?' Of these responses, 10 mentioned a lack of confidence, skill or fluency. 4 mentioned time constraints or demands of their current role. One response mentioned a lack of information about the language aide program.
- To change minds about joining the language aide program, respondents mentioned that more information about the program and clear definitions of the boundaries would help (4 responses). 2 respondents said formal training would help to change their mind about joining the language aide program.

Qualitative Analysis

Translating and Interpreting in the Local Government Context

The Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 (the Act) states that all individuals in Victoria are equally entitled to access opportunities and participate in and contribute to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the State. Interpreting and translation services are crucial to ensuring this is achieved.⁴

Further, Victoria's Equal Opportunity Act 2010 includes a 'positive duty obligation' which means that government agencies need to take proactive and reasonable steps to address causes of discrimination, regardless of whether a complaint has been made or not. A number of other Acts, both State and Federal, include provisions on the use of interpreting and translating services. Types of discrimination can include:

- refusing to provide a service
- providing a poor quality service
- having unreasonable requirements, conditions or practices within the organisation that disadvantages a person because of their race, disability or other attributes.

In addition, the failure to identify the need for or to promote the availability of an appropriate language service may have legal consequences. Local Government routinely makes decisions that affect the rights of individuals or provide services that require client consent. This can create a risk of inadequate procedural fairness which can sometimes result in legal decisions being appealed, reviewed and overturned, incurring additional costs and avoidable delays.

The Language Aide program addresses these obligations by enhancing the availability of language support to all consumers and provides a cultural bridge into a sometimes cumbersome and regulation oriented business. The program provides an interim and immediate measure for consumers who may have an entrenched distrust of governments and government processes. This can be especially true for people who have arrived in Australia and spent time in detention centres where their immediate experience has formed a personal view of all government agencies. Providing interpreting and translating services is an essential way of ensuring that non-English speakers stay connected and that a trusting relationship can be built around these services. This is paramount to integration, resilience and economic success⁵

In terms of Council's commitment to employee diversity, the program directly supports the implementation of Darebin's Diversity Capabilities Framework by calling on the skills of staff to aid in the routine work that council does with its residents and other stakeholders. The pool of Language Aide support staff includes people from a diversity of age, gender and spoken language groups who are acknowledged and remunerated for their skills. As a result, Language Aides became champions of access and equity in their respective work areas.

Bilingual Skills of the Customer Service Team

The Customer Service unit consists of 32 staff in total. 59% of Customer Service staff group are currently registered as Language Aides; by comparing this figure to 37% of Darebin's overall residential population identified as speaking a LOTE, we are confident that our staffing adequately covers the community's LOTE communication requirements on a day-to-day basis.

⁴ (Victorian Government, 2017)

⁵ (Scanlon Foundation, 2016)

Language Aide support is currently offered in the following languages:

- Auslan
- Bahasa Indonesia
- Cantonese
- Greek
- Italian
- Macedonian
- Mandarin
- Serbian
- Sinhala
- Spanish
- Vietnamese

Staff outside of the Customer Service area support the Language Aide service in the following languages:

- Hindi
- Farsi/Persian
- Somali
- Macedonian
- Arabic
- Turkish

Current Remuneration Model

The Language Aide Allowance is a cost effective way of providing language services within the organisation. The allowance is currently available to staff that are fluent in English and one or more languages other than English (LOTE).

It is paid to an employee who undertakes work involving direct contact with speakers of the LOTE that they speak, and agrees to use these language skills to assist members of the public who have limited English proficiency.

There is no doubt that residents and other stakeholders who need language assistance should be provided with this vital service and there is no question that the service is an effective way of utilising existing resources to meet the needs of diverse client groups.

Issues around the current remuneration model have indicated that a new model of compensation be adopted in line with the Policy update, the introduction of a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and in line with goals set out in the 2017-2021 Council Plan. Issues include:

- never having to undertake Language Aide duties despite being paid a full allowance;
- no position description or duty statement and expectations of language aides;
- a lack of revision of skills and training;
- no opportunity to build real-world skills that add to a person's employability; and
- equal distribution of work.

Proposed Remuneration Model

A proposed remuneration model has been designed to further consider training, certification and skills improvement as central to payment. It is modelled on both the Victorian Public Service Language Aide Allowance and the NSW Community Language Allowance scheme.

Further, the proposed model allows recipients of the allowance a pathway to undertake accreditation by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), which guarantees that recipients' skills meet national standards for interpreters and translators.

The full proposed remuneration model and amendments to the policy relating to reimbursement are provided via [appendix two](#).

Clarification of Language Aides and their Obligation to Object to Work

The operation of the Language Aide program throughout the years has been so well entrenched in the operation of day-to-day Council business that the role and abilities of our Language Aide support officers can be confused with that of professional translators and interpreters. In fact, the role of translators and interpreters is also often confused as one and the same. NAATI defines the difference as follows⁶:

Translators deal with the written word. They translate written text from one language to another.

Interpreters deal with the spoken word or signed languages. They interpret what each speaker is saying or signing into the other person's language.

To further define the work of our Language Aide staff we have outlined parameters that allow officers to decline support requests:

- A language aide is an employee who uses a language other than English in the course of their regular work to assist community members
- Language Aides are only able to assist with low-risk communication
- The skills of language aides should be verified by the employer in both English and the language other than English
- It is not a credential in interpreting or translating and should not be construed as such
- Language Aides are required to undertake training to understand the boundaries of their role
- Departments should maintain a database of language aides in their employment so staff can access them quickly and easily
- Language aides should only provide language assistance where the outcome of a situation has no risk of adverse effects for either the client or the organisation.
- Language aides should not be used to communicate information that is legally binding or puts at risk either the organisation or the client.⁷

Managing the Multilingual Telephone Line (MTL)

It is evident by the MTL Queue abandonment data and community survey results that an improvement to the delivery of the MTL service can be made by increasing the availability of officers to respond to the needs of CALD customers more immediately.

The following amendments are recommended to ensure that calls to the multilingual line are well managed:

⁶ (National Authority for Accreditation of Translators and Interpreters, 2017)

⁷ (Victorian Government, 2017)

- The initial announcement to be shortened to under 10 seconds to reduce the incidence of abandonment e.g. “Welcome to the Darebin Multilingual Line”
- After the main announcement and auto-attendant will announce “for xxx language press #” for each language type (top 10 languages). This will ensure all English calls are directed to the main Customer Service (8888) queue and that callers will not attempt to circumvent the queue.
- Language Aide officers are ‘prime agents’ with dedicated ‘Skills Routing’ for their nominated spoken language/s. This will route the calls to the correct agent in the available language instantly.
- If the agent is not available the call will have a nominated language (predetermined by the auto-attendant) and the right phone interpreter can be then contacted and connected to the caller more efficiently.
- All other calls to the MTL outside of the top 10 languages and English are to be routed to the general speak your language number and the prime agent will answer the call as per a usual queue call

Benchmarking

It is well recognised that Darebin City Council is a leader in the field of providing multilingual support to its customers and stakeholders. Benchmarking has demonstrated that Darebin has the largest pool of Language Aides and represents a wide variety of languages spoken across the municipality, including those groups who are most at risk of disengagement. The benchmarking process indicated that municipalities outside of the Northern Region are not yet in a position to offer formalised in-house support of CALD residents aside from professional interpreting services. The table below compares the status of each Language Aide program across Metropolitan Northern Region LGAs.

Language Aide Programs across Metropolitan Northern Region LGAs

LGA	# of Language Aides	Languages Represented	Multilingual Line	VITS	TIS	Online Presence
Darebin	19	Arabic Auslan Bahasa - Indonesia Greek Italian Farsi/Persian Hindi Italian Macedonian Mandarin Punjabi Serbian/Croatian Sinhalese Spanish Turkish Vietnamese	Yes	2 nd Option Accessed via separate numbers	1 st Option – TIS user for telephone interpreting	Basic information provided in top 8 community languages. Frequent translations of community information in top 8 languages. Facilitated by Diverse Communications Officer.
Moreland	11 Based on Darebin's model, Language Aides are trained by VITS.	Italian, Greek, Arabic and Turkish. Staff not accredited by NAATI.	No multilingual line – callers are directed to call the regular Customer Service number and be connected with a Language Aide.	Accessed via separate numbers	N/A	Council gives topical information in community languages
Whittlesea	Capped at 20 in top 10 languages. Based on Darebin's model, Language Aides are trained by VITS.	Arabic, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Macedonian, Mandarin, Punjabi, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese.	No multilingual line – callers are directed to call the regular Customer Service number and be connected with a Language Aide.	Accessed via separate numbers.	N/A	Information provided in other Languages for a limited number of pages
Hume	There is a bilingual service offering that is limited to staff who are not located within the Customer Service Team. Some are CSOs who have NAATI Lang Aide training (Arabic & Turkish).	N/A	N/A	Accessed via separate numbers	TIS User	N/A

**Moreland and Whittlesea utilise a similar testing system as language aides in Darebin. Upon assignment, new Language Aides are required to conduct a short interview with a VITS officer to determine the level of their language ability.

Current Language Aide Recruitment and Testing Model

The appointment of Language Aides has not been based on any prior experience or qualifications. In the past, the model of recruitment is to consider the cultural origin of a Customer Service Officer as the priority over other skills that are crucial to the tasks required of the broader role. This has often resulted in the employment of staff who are not equipped to perform tasks related to the breadth, depth, technicalities and difficulty of a Local Government customer service role.

To further complicate the current model of Language Aide officer recruitment, training is not based on a tested or proven language training model and has room for improvement and formalisation. Training currently supplied by VITS does not address language acquisition and maintenance needs of staff and does not support the further development of interpreting and translating skills.

The current competency test (which has not changed since the program's inception in 2000) appoints an interpreter from the VITS pool of interpreters in the selected language. The interpreter is issued a proforma and instigates a conversation with the Language Aide applicant. The applicant is judged on the merits of that guided conversation. Some concerns about this approach include:

- It is not based on any factual or researched approach to language proficiency assessment;
- The interpreter is (presumably) not a qualified assessor of the chosen spoken LOTE;
- Fluency in the source language (English) is not tested via this process;
- The community expectation of interpreters and translators is that they are assessed based on the requirements put forward by NAATI. This expectation is not met at Darebin.

Proposed Language Aide Testing and Recruitment Model

Darebin wishes to begin aligning its testing, training and accreditation of Language Aides with NAATI's new language testing and interpreter/translator certification regime. This will allow us to adopt standardisation and quality control of the previous ad-hoc arrangement of recruitment and testing of bilingual staff.

Presuming that a person can interpret or translate just by having fluency in a LOTE is an unfortunate and shared misconception. Translation and interpreting are specific skills that must be developed over time. We propose that Darebin implements the testing system being developed by NAATI which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).⁸

The CEFR is a framework, published by the Council of Europe in 2001, which describes a language learners' ability in terms of speaking, reading, listening and writing at six reference levels as defined in the table below.

⁸ (Council of Europe, 2001)

Level group	Level group name	Level	Level name	Description
A	Basic user	A1	Breakthrough or beginner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people they know and things they have. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
		A2	Waystage or elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
B	Independent user	B1	Threshold or intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
		B2	Vantage or upper intermediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
C	Proficient user	C1	Effective operational proficiency or advanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer clauses, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
		C2	Mastery or proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations.

Table 6 (Council of Europe, 2001)

Another key aspect of the CEFR's approach is the belief in 'plurilingualism'. This is the understanding that a language is not learned in isolation from other languages. Studying a foreign language inevitably involves comparisons with a first language. Each new language that a learner encounters contributes to the development of general language proficiency, weaving together all the learner's previous experiences of language learning. It becomes easier and easier to pick up at least a partial competence in new languages.⁹

Proficiency refers to the ability of performing an action or function. It refers to one's ability to use language for real world purposes to accomplish real world linguistic tasks, across a wide range of topics and settings. The language proficiency test is an evaluation of how well a person can use language to communicate in real life.¹⁰ This is in line with the upcoming changes to the NAATI Accreditation Framework (Appendix 2).

One of the benefits of making expectations about minimum levels of proficiency explicit is that these levels can also serve as benchmarks for monitoring proficiency standards both at entry and exit from the range of accredited courses preparing people for work in the Translating and Interpreting profession.

Advertising for language skills through our recruitment process is an effective way of increasing the multilingual resources in Customer Service. Position descriptions and job advertisements includes phrases such as:

- Persons from language other than English backgrounds are encouraged to apply
- The ability to speak a community language is desirable
- Bilingual applicants are encouraged to apply, but this is not a prerequisite
- Persons who speak (community language) are encouraged to apply
- Suitably qualified candidates with a high level of fluency in a community language as identified in the most recent ABS Census are encouraged to apply

Incorporation of Local Indigenous Languages in the Language Aide Program

We acknowledge that Darebin is the home of many significant Aboriginal organisations and Council has a perfect opportunity to learn and share in the living history of both Traditional Owner groups and the many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and nations that have settled in the municipality and contribute to the growing local economy of Darebin. In Australia, most Indigenous people identify strongly with a traditional cultural and linguistic identity. This identity encompasses the tribe with which they identify geographically and is a distinct linguistic group. In the vast majority of cases, the tribal name is also the given to the tribe's spoken language.¹¹

The Second National Indigenous Survey conducted in 2014 found that traditional language is a strong part of Indigenous people's identity, and connection with language is critical for their wellbeing¹². Survey respondents want traditional languages to be strong into the future; they want their languages to have better recognition within Australia. The survey also indicates that active use and transmission of languages is the key to strengthening or maintaining traditional languages, while a lack of opportunities to share language prevents respondents from learning traditional languages.

⁹ (Trim, 2011)

¹⁰ (National Accreditation Agency for Translating and Interpreting, 2016)

¹¹ (Marmion, 2014)

¹² (Marmion, 2014)

In light of moving toward a community that is focused on inclusivity with an emphasis on Reconciliation and Council's collective focus on making service delivery and programs more equitable by reducing discrimination and increasing access for vulnerable or under-represented people we propose that efforts be made to explore the opportunity to include employees who are speakers of local aboriginal languages into the Language Aide Support group¹³.

Together with this understanding, and with the multitude of sacred cultural sites across the Darebin LGA and important historical events being located within our municipality it is vital to incorporate a plan to work towards the inclusion of Koorie languages such as Woiwurrung and Aboriginal English to support our customers as part of the Language Aide program.

Working with our Aboriginal Liaison Officer, the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee, Aboriginal Employment Officer and other stakeholders, we will work towards creating a significant and inclusive plan to integrate indigenous language and include this as part of Council's Aboriginal Action Plan 2017-2019.

¹³ (Darebin City Council, 2017)

List of Recommendations

No	Recommendation	Resource Implication
1.	Implement pre-certification training identified by NAATI for as an opt-in option for existing Language Aides and as mandatory for new Language Aides.	Internal resources
2.	Implement the testing system being developed by NAATI which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as optional for existing Language Aides and as mandatory for new Language Aides.	Internal resources
3.	Investigate changes to data collection that allow simple, request-linked and easy reporting of support instances in Pathway (or any customer request system).	Internal resources
4.	Develop a performance measure for the MTL to continuously monitor service performance and usage.	Internal resources
5.	Implement suggested changes to the routing of MTL calls and usage of prime agents and skills based routing.	Internal resources
6.	Ensure that the internal and external communications and training plan is refined and implemented. This should include communication via the intranet, website and updates in the knowledge management system.	Internal resources
7.	Implement and communicate within the organisation all key Language Aide policy and guidelines changes including adoption of the training, recruitment and remuneration recommendations.	Internal resources
8.	Work with Councils within the Northern Metropolitan Region to explore, develop and share resources and ideas for expansion and shared services.	Internal resources
9.	Implement processes to count CALD visitors to all Customer Service Centres.	Internal resources
10.	Work towards creating a significant and inclusive plan to integrate indigenous language into the Language Aide program and include this as part of Council's Aboriginal Action Plan 2017-2019.	Internal resources
11.	Measure the effectiveness of changes to the policy and guidelines quarterly	Internal resources

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Accreditation Steps

NAATI Accreditation Model

The new NAATI accreditation model won't be rolled out until the beginning of 2018 and is currently under review. The new VPS Guidelines will likely be released in early July this year.

The base level (previously referred to by NAATI as the Language Aide certification) will require our Language Aides to undertake one of the following pathways to 'Provisional Certification' (this is still at the proposal level):

- **PATHWAY ONE**

Graduate of a NAATI endorsed interpreting qualification no more than three years prior to the date of application – Diploma or higher (AQF 1 Level 5 or comparable)

- **PATHWAY TWO**

Graduate from a non-NAATI endorsed interpreting qualification –Diploma or higher (AQF1 level 5 or comparable); and

- Met the standard set by NAATI for language competency, ethical competency and intercultural competency tests

PATHWAY THREE

- Holds Certified Provisional Interpreter in another language.

- **PATHWAY FOUR (preferred pathway)**

Completion of AQF units in interpreting theory and/or practice assessed by NAATI as meeting pre-requisite requirements or NAATI offered Interpreter Training Modules.

- Met the standard set by NAATI for language competency, ethical competency and intercultural competency tests.

- **PATHWAY FIVE**

Already holds NAATI Recognised Practising Interpreter credential in the language.

Test Format (for all pathways) conducted by NAATI or an approved accreditation organisation

The test will be in both language directions.

Each test will consist of three tasks.

1. One telephone dialogue interpreting (consecutive mode) role play
2. Two face-to-face dialogue interpreting (consecutive mode) role plays.
Each dialogue will relate to different domains and will be based on real-life exchanges as encountered by non-English speakers in everyday life situations in non-specialised and non-complex contexts, e.g. enquiry about government services for new immigrants, a customer purchasing a car, enquiry about parental payments at a government office. Approximate length – 40 minutes

Recertification Requirements

Evidence of:

- ongoing work practice – **40** assignments per year for interpreters
- continuous professional development – **40** PD points per year

Ongoing certification will be dependent on ethical and professional conduct by the practitioner

Language Proficiency Testing

Melbourne University Placement Tests (MUPTs) measuring general proficiency in French, German, Arabic, Italian, Chinese, Indonesian, Spanish and Russian;

Appendix 2 - Language Aide Allowance & Remuneration

This policy provides for the payment of a Language Aide Allowance to suitably qualified employees who have a basic level of competence in a language other than English.

Objectives - Policy statement

A significant number of people in Darebin whose first language is not English either do not speak English or do not have sufficient command of the language to avail themselves of the services and programs provided by Darebin City Council.

As a strategy to provide equal access to departmental services and programs, the Language Aide program draws on the existing language skills of employees of Darebin City Council.

Audience and applicability

All bilingual/multilingual permanent and temporary customer service, administrative and business support staff are eligible to apply for the Language Aide Allowance.

Context

The Language Aide program is administered by the Customer Service business unit.

Responsibilities and delegations

Language Aide Allowance recipients are responsible for the following:

- providing timely and accurate language assistance;
- keeping informed about the City of Darebin's services and referral points related to their work area, as well as a general understanding of other departmental services;
- determining if a matter is formal or sufficiently complex to warrant the use of interpreters and notifying the appropriate person to ensure that this assistance is provided;
- keeping records of Language Aide usage; and
- notifying their manager or supervisor if the Language Aide workload is excessive, that is, if the demand for Language Aide assistance is impacting negatively on the employee's normal workload.

Responsibilities of officers with delegation of authority to approve payment of a language aide allowance.

Officers or their nominees with the delegation of authority to approve payment of the Language Aide Allowance have particular responsibilities with regard to the implementation of the Language Aide program. These include:

- identifying the potential demand for a specific language within their area;
- determining the languages, number and locations of recipients under the Language Aides service;
- surveying the existing language skills of staff members who may be eligible for Language Aide testing;
- advising all staff in the workplace of the names of Language Aide recipients and ensuring all staff, the public and service users are aware of the availability of the service;
- ensuring Language Aide Allowance recipients are available to use their community language/s when required;

- Notifying payroll to organise payment of the Language Aide Allowance once it has been approved and to stop payment once the Language Aide Allowance recipient no longer uses their language skills. This may be due to a change in tasks or when the employee is transferred to another location where there is no demand for the language skills; and
- Biannually reviewing staff members receiving a Language Aide Allowance to determine that there is continued demand for their language assistance;.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements

The Manager, Customer Service, or nominee, will monitor the implementation of the Language Aide Allowance. This will include review with appropriate stakeholders and reporting on compliance as required.

Responsibilities of the Customer Service Enhancement Officer – Diversity & Multicultural

The main responsibilities of the Customer Service Enhancement Officer include:

- distributing information on the Language Aide program throughout the organisation using a pre-defined communications plan;
- arranging for external advertising and promotional opportunities using a pre-defined communications plan
- reviewing and updating the list of staff receiving the Language Aide Allowance;
- liaising with NAATI about the Provisional Interpreter test; arranging testing and training for Language Aides; and
- providing, when required, a report on the Language Aide program and MTL usage.
- organising quarterly monthly meetings of Language Aides, preparing agendas, minutes and following up on actions raised
- Organising on-site interpreters as per requests from various departments.
- Monitoring the usage of the Multilingual Telephone Line to ensure it is properly used by all customer service officers and other officers across the organisation
- Training newly recruited customer service staff on the usage of the MTL
- Ensuring data is entered into the MTL register following Language aide interactions(interpreting etc.)
- Providing feedback to interpreting agency in relation to complaints about interpreting
- Updating information regarding the MTL and Language Aides on the intranet and Knowledge Hub
- Liaising with payroll regarding the payment of the Language Aides allowance twice a year.

Appendix 3 - Procedures for Administering the Language Aide Allowance

These procedures outline the eligibility requirements and payment procedures for staff members receiving the Language Aide Allowance.

Directors, Managers and Coordinators, have authority to approve the payment of the Language Aide Allowance to eligible employees and determine the level of payment. The Language Aide Allowance is paid to approved customer service, business support, administrative and desk-based staff from the Language Aide Allowance budget.

The two current rates for the Language Aide Allowance, which will be adjusted in accordance with relevant awards and agreements, are:

- the base level rate which is paid to staff members who have passed the P examination conducted by NAATI and whose language skills are required to meet occasional demands for one to one language assistance. Occasional demand means that there is no regular pattern of demand that necessitates the use of the staff member's language skills.
- the higher level rate is one and a half times the base allowance which is paid to staff members who use their language skills for one to one language assistance on a regular basis or who have achieved qualifications of NAATI Provisionally Certified Interpreter and above and who are required to meet either occasional or regular demands for one to one language assistance.

Status of Language Aide Allowance recipients

Language Aide Allowance recipients are to be viewed as language aides and not fully qualified interpreters or translators. Language Aide Allowance recipients do not necessarily have the requisite skills for undertaking the type of work a Provisionally Certified or Certified Interpreter or translator undertakes.

The Language Aide Test

To be eligible for a Language Aide Allowance, the staff member (except those already accredited by NAATI) must pass a language test to determine their ability to speak and/or read a community language. The test is conducted and administered by NAATI and consists of the following elements:

- conversation in English and a language other than English in a semi-formal context, as well as a complex or problematic exchange;
- summarising brochure or work-related text from English into the language being tested;
- summarising brochure or work-related text from the language being tested into English; and
- reading out loud a text in the language being tested.

Employees who are accredited by NAATI at pre-certification level and above do not need to sit for the NAATI test.

Costs for Language Aide testing and any review of test results will be funded from the Language Aide budget.

Appendix 4 - Communication & Training Plan

Action	Internal/External	Communication Channel	Responsibility	Collateral Required
Discuss and plan use of 'Speak Your Language' branding with Communications team	Internal	Web/Print	Language Aide Support Officer Customer Service Team Leader	Postcard Ads Feedback Form Online
Introduce new badges that identify Customer Service staff as Language Aides	Internal	FtF	Language Aide Support Officer	Badges
Create a dedicated web page with all relevant links and information that explains the Language Aide service and how it is used	External	Web	Customer Service Administration Officer Language Aide Support Officer Communications	Online
Create a calendar and targeted campaign of Social Media 'stories' that can be issued every 6 weeks regarding council's varied language aide officers/users	External	Web	Language Aide Support Officer Communications	Online
Create multiple YouTube animations that explain the service as a series: • Interviews with users of the service (diverse ages, needs etc...)	External	Web	Language Aide Support Officer Communications	Online

Action	Internal/External	Communication Channel	Responsibility	Collateral Required
• Interviews with staff captioned in LOTE languages (selectable on YouTube)				
Drop in sessions??? @ Northland/Northcote Plaza/DCH/North Reservoir	External	FtF	Language Aide Support Officer Communications	Postcard Ads Feedback Form
Explore efficacy of radio campaigns for targeted language and cultural groups	External	Radio	Language Aide Support Officer Communications	Ads
Explore Skype for Business for Video calls	Internal	Web/Telephone	Language Aide Support Officer Digital Services Customer Service Team Leader	NIL
Bi-annual meetings of the Language Aide Support Group	Internal	FtF	Language Aide Support Officer	Feedback Form
Provide bi-monthly updates in Staff to Staff on Language Aides & Language Aide Program etc....	Internal	Web	Language Aide Support Officer	NIL
Appropriate Lang Aide support training offered by	Internal	FtF & Online	Language Aide Support Officer Customer Service Team Leader – Training & Development	NIL

Action	Internal/External	Communication Channel	Responsibility	Collateral Required
NAATI				
Annual Working with Interpreters and Translators training for Darebin – P&D to facilitate	Internal	FtF & Online	Customer Service Team Leader – Training & Development Learning & Development	NIL
Cross Cultural Communication Training for Staff at Darebin – P&D to facilitate	Internal	FtF & Online	Customer Service Team Leader – Training & Development Learning & Development	NIL

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