

Waverley Council



WAVERLEY
COUNCIL

Language Aide Service Guidelines

February 2004

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1. Introduction

The 2001 Census indicated that 22% of Waverley's population speaks a language other than English at home (a Community Language), representing more than thirty-five languages. Proficiency in the English language varies among these people with 6% stating that they speak very poor English, or no English at all.

Waverley has for many years been a culturally and linguistically diverse community. In response to this diversity, Council developed a Multicultural Policy in 1991 to help provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services. A Language Aide service is a practical way of providing such a service.

The *Use of Skills of the Local Government Award (2000)* and the *Language Aide Kit (2001)* (developed by a division of the Local Government Community Services Association (LGCSA) were significant in the update of these guidelines.

The guidelines aim to clarify the roles, limitations and expectations regarding the Language Aide Service currently operating in Waverley Council. It also endeavours to clarify matters of procedure, particularly in relation to monitoring and reviewing the service.

2. What is a community language?

A community language is a language other than English spoken day-to-day by a segment of the population.

3. What is a Community Language Allowance Scheme (CLAS)?

The Community Language Scheme uses the trained and accredited language skills of Council employees (Language Aide Officers), to establish communication with customers who may not be fluent in English.

The three points below describe the main function of a Language Aide. These were noted in the MEU publication *More Than Just the Voice* (Poulos 1993:28).

The Language Aide:

1. Provides information in a language other than English to assist non-English speaking background customers to access and use Council services.
2. Interprets basic information using a language other than English in interactions between customers from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse background (CALD) and another Council officer.
3. Assists in providing information to other employees and Council to help in the provision of a more effective service to non-English speaking background customers.

CLAS is an allowance paid to selected NSW public sector employees who have a basic level of competency in a language other than English and who work in locations where their language can be used to assist clients. While Council may use the CLAS for accreditation of its staff, it uses the Local Government (State) Award's Community Language Allowance under the "Community Language and Signing Work" section, for remuneration of its Language Aides.

4. What is the difference between a Language Aide and an Interpreter?

A Language Aide is only expected to have an elementary level of language skills for purposes of simple communication. This is regarded as Level 1 Accreditation. Waverley Council seeks accreditation of staff through the Community Relations Commission, under the Community Language Allowance Scheme, (CLAS) or from the University of New South Wales Institute of Languages.

An interpreter, on the other hand, must have some depth of linguistic ability in both languages, an ability to work between the languages with accuracy as well as professional interpreting and translating skills. Accreditation is usually through the NAATI. The minimum requirement as the entry point to the profession is Level 2. Accreditation through NAATI can range from Level 2 to Level 5 (Extremely Advanced Interpreter/Translator).

Both CLAS and NAATI accredited interpreters will be accepted as Language Aides (provided they are eligible under section 9 point 4) and they will be paid under the Local Government (State) Award's Community Language Allowance.

5. What are the Advantages of the Language Aide Service?

5.1. Advantages for Council

- ◆ Establishes communication between the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) community and the Council.
- ◆ Improves access to Council services and programs by people from CALD background.
- ◆ Ensures that customers understand their legal obligations, rights and duties and helps avoid confusion and misunderstandings.
- ◆ Helps provide a more personal approach to customer service.
- ◆ Fulfils Council's commitment to providing quality services, which do not exclude people on the basis of their language.
- ◆ Provides improved public relations.
- ◆ Confirms that the Council acknowledges and values its CALD community and the cultural, social and economic benefits it brings to the Waverley area.

5.2. Advantages for the customer

- ◆ Encourages people of CALD to use Council services and programs.
- ◆ Makes their encounter with Council more positive and communication more effective.
- ◆ Reduces misunderstandings.
- ◆ Reduces isolation and improves the customer's settlement process in the area.

6. Language Aide Guidelines for Council Employees

When approached by a customer who has difficulty speaking or understanding English:

1. Find out the language spoken by the customer (it is not enough to know what country they are from). All Customer Service counters should have a Language Chart, which can be shown to the customer if a tool is needed to help identify their language.
2. Once you have established the language spoken, check the list of Council accredited Language Aides. Ring the extension of the appropriate person to see if they are available. If so, they may be able to help in person or over the phone (telephones with dual handsets are available in some sections of Council to assist staff in the use of interpreters).
3. Language Aides should be available on call to convey information and to answer enquiries to the best of their ability. Enquiries should generally be limited to no more than 15 minutes. When a matter becomes complicated, lengthy, or involves the explanation of technical terms, a professional interpreter from outside Council, should be arranged.
4. If a Council Language Aide is not available or other telephone language services are required ring the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450. State your name, the Department, Council you are calling from, Council's Client Number (C018809) and the exact language required. Be patient, you may not be connected the first time or you may be placed in a queue.
5. If you need to talk face to face with the person and need a telephone interpreter, you can use the dual handset available for this purpose at the Customer Service Counter, the Corporate Services Interview Room and the Mill Hill Centre's First Floor Interview Room.
6. Look directly at the person. Get them to take up the other telephone handset and start your interview. If you do not wish to use the dual handset facility, you may use the telephone conference facility using any handset in the Council Chambers.

In the situation where you have no access to a dual handset, use your dual handset or speaker phone, ring TIS and arrange for an interpreter in the language of the client. Explain to the interpreter that at the end of the conversation with the client, the interpreter needs to summarise the conversation for you.

7. Use short sentences and always clarify if they understand and ask if they have any questions.
8. If an on-site professional interpreter is needed, this can be organised in advance, through the Community Relations Commission or other interpreter services. The Community Worker – Multicultural at Council's Community Services could assist you.
9. Language Aides must fill out Waverley Council's Data Collection Form (see Appendix 1) with details such as the nature of the enquiry, time involved and language-spoken. These must be sent to the Community Worker - Multicultural, otherwise the Language Aide will not get paid.

7. How are Language Aides chosen?

The most effective Language Aide Schemes are those that manage a good 'fit' between community needs and staff skills.

A range of factors will determine language priorities, for example:

- ◆ The number of residents from a particular language background living in Waverley.
- ◆ The level of English proficiency of those communities.
- ◆ Recent arrivals in Australia.
- ◆ Refugee and arrivals under humanitarian schemes may be given particular consideration if the need is indicated.
- ◆ If a department of Council is aware of recurring communication problems, which may be reduced by a Language Aide for a particular community language.
- ◆ Number of customer service inquiries, requesting language assistance.
- ◆ Existing number of Language Aides for particular languages.

Essential skills for the Language Aide, in addition to being bi-lingual, will include:

- ◆ Ability to establish rapport and good communication skills.
- ◆ Ability to handle all enquiries in a confidential manner.
- ◆ Ability to convey information to a non-English speaking background customer, with accuracy and an impartial manner.
- ◆ Ability to handle situations in a respectful way showing sensitivity to different cultures.
- ◆ Ability to use active listening.
- ◆ Availability to use his/her community language skill in at least 80% of requests.

In addition to the essential skills it is desirable that the Language Aides develop the following skills drawn from the MEU publication *More Than Just the Voice* (Poulos 1993:29): A copy of this is available from the Community Worker - Multicultural.

- ◆ Ability to handle the dynamics of an interaction so that all participants are involved and information is exchanged smoothly.
- ◆ Ability to control the scope of an interaction and confine it to matters at hand.
- ◆ Ability to identify the need to use other language services when necessary.

8. Language Aides Service Review

Council aspires to have Language Aides spread throughout Council departments and their location within the organisation is an important consideration. However, the language skills of staff may not always match the languages of high priority. The extent of choice will be limited to those Council staff who have the appropriate community language and are prepared to become Language Aides. In setting up a review it is therefore necessary to commence by conducting an internal ‘Language Audit’ to select the appropriate staff.

The review will be advertised in the Pipeline. Staff interested in becoming a Language Aide or finding more information should contact the Community Worker - Multicultural.

A broad Language Audit will begin to identify employees with the skills and interest in becoming accredited Language Aide Officers. The following guidelines will be used for selecting appropriate staff for testing and accreditation.

1. Review current system by conducting a language audit to:
 - ◆ identify staff who speak one or more community languages;
 - ◆ identify what those community languages are;
 - ◆ identify the location of the bi-lingual staff within Council.
2. Collate responses and compare with Australian Bureau of Statistics data for Waverley.
3. Consult with specific areas such as Community Services, Customer Call Centre or “in the field” to determine language aide assistance required.
4. Analyse current usage of Language Aides using the Data Collection Form (see Appendix 1). This will be collected on a monthly basis.
5. On the basis of this data, the most appropriately placed (and used) staff will be identified and recommended for accreditation.

Four further steps need to be undertaken:

1. Seek the support and approval of the recommended staff from their Supervisor/Manager and Director with reference to the essential criteria in the position (see above and Appendix 4)
2. Ensure that the recommended staff member agrees to abide by and undertake the duties outlined in the guidelines for Language Aides.
3. Organise testing for accreditation (which includes an examination by an approved body (see Appendix 6)
4. With the approval of their managers and after receiving accreditation, the person’s name and contact details will be added to the pool of Language Aides for distribution within Council. Language Aides will then need to record data about when their skills are used so they can receive the allowance on the Data Collection Form. (see Appendix 1).

9. What ongoing commitment does Council have to Language Aides?

Council's policy provides that employees, who use their community language skills as an adjunct to their normal duties, must be selected according to certain criteria. They must also be accredited and supported in their duties as Language Aides.

Payment for the use of Community Language Aides will be at the rate set for the Local Government (State) Award's Community Language Allowance as varied from time to time. Language Aides may be paid on a regular or irregular basis. When employees use a community language on a regular basis (at least 20 occasions in a six month period), the weekly maximum payment will be made on an ongoing basis. When employees use their community language on an irregular basis the weekly maximum payment will be paid for any week in which the skills are used.

The Award provides that employees who use language skills as an adjunct to their normal duties are entitled to be paid the allowance when they use the language skills whether on a regular or irregular basis.

- ◆ Council will make arrangements for the accreditation process in consultation with the person undergoing the language test.
- ◆ Council will meet the costs associated with accrediting language skills and tests may be undertaken during working hours.
- ◆ The person will be provided with training and resources to enable them to work effectively in their role.
- ◆ Council staff and new staff will be trained to work with Language Aides, frontline staff first and then other staff in the next calendar year, to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the role and limitations of the Language Aide.

10. Customer Complaints

Customers have a right to complain if they receive poor service from a Language Aide or another Council officer. Complaints about Language Aides or the failure of a Council officer to access language services can be made to the Administrative / Information Services Manager through the Translating and Interpreting Service (phone 131 450) or another language service chosen by the customer. The Information Services Manager can receive either verbal or written complaints. Written complaints can be in English or the customer's first language.

The Information Services Manager will accept the complaint and refer to the Manager of the identified Language Aide to deal with the complaint. The Community Worker - Multicultural will be advised of issues involved, where these relate to the service. Adequate confidentiality protocols will be maintained.

In any situation where complaints or concerns have been raised about a particular Language Aide, the person concerned must be informed and given fair and adequate opportunity to respond. Appropriate grievance procedures should be followed whenever necessary.

11. Language Aide Monitoring and Review

Once payment of the Community Language Allowance is approved for a Language Aide, it will be reviewed annually, or whenever the employment status of staff receiving the allowance changes. Reviews will address the continuing need for communication in a language, availability of staff involved, and any changes required to improve the effectiveness of the service.

Language Aides are required to complete individual monitoring forms and pass them on to the Community Worker - Multicultural who will endorse and forward them to the Pay Office for payment of "irregular" Language Aide use. This information will be supplemented by comments received from supervisors (see Appendix 5) and any customer comments or complaints. The results of the Review and any issues requiring attention as well as changes to the Scheme will be forwarded to the individual Directors.

Individual Language Aides cannot consider their arrangement to be permanent. The spread of languages provided through the service will be reviewed annually.

Nominations may be called for annually and changes will include the discontinuation of the allowance to a particular staff member who ceases to be a Language Aide. Three months notice will be given to the current Language Aide regarding the possible loss of his/her allowance.

Changes may occur for a range of reasons, for example:

- ◆ The Language Aide has indicated that they do not feel their service is sufficiently used and they have requested to have their name removed from the pool of Language Aides.
- ◆ The demographic make up of the area has changed sufficiently to warrant a change in the languages provided through the service.
- ◆ An Aide is unable to adhere to the Statement of Duties and Responsibilities for any reason. (see Appendix 2).
- ◆ The person is not sufficiently available to attend to enquiries because of the demands of their position.
- ◆ A Language Aide has moved to a new department, requiring a reassessment of the availability and distribution of Languages across departments.

12. Bibliography

Curtis, Kristi (1993), Language Aides Information Kit, Rockdale Council.

Department of Local Government, Training Kit - Local Councils: Service in a multicultural society.

Community Relations Commission of NSW, Recruitment and Training Unit, CLAS Kit.

Marrickville Council, Policy on Language Allowances.

Poulos, Eric (1993), More Than Just The Voice: The recognition of Language Other Than English Skills of Local Government Staff in Relation to the Skills Based Award in New South Wales, consultancy for the Federal MEU.

Ethnic Worker's in Local Government (2001), Language Aide Kit, Local Government Community Services Association

Appendix 1

Waverley Council's Data Collection Form for Language Aides

Total number of services(Manager/Supervisor)

Date:

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Manager/Supervisor)

Please return this form to the Community Worker Multicultural, Community Services. This form will be sent to the Pay Office. The information you record on the form will also be used to monitor the Language Aides Service, and used in the Annual Service review. Statistics collated by language from this form will be included in the Management Plan Reports.

PAY OFFICE ACTION REQUIRED

Please pay weekly maximum Language Aide allowance for the following weeks:

Total Weeks:

Week Commencing:

Week Commencing:

Pay Run No:

Week Commencing:

Week Commencing:

Back Pay: \$

Week Commencing:

Actioned by:

Appendix 2

Language Aide - Statement of Duties and Responsibilities

1. To be available during working hours to use language skills to answer enquiries from people who have difficulty speaking English.
2. To provide basic assistance with communication between a Council employee and a resident of non-English speaking background, during a face-to-face or telephone enquiry. This assistance is for simple and general Council matters only.
3. To assist Council staff and customers with completing Council forms, and providing an oral version of simple documents in either English or the relevant community language as required.
4. On an occasional basis, to review and comment on any translated information that Council wishes to distribute.
5. To advise the Council employee who you are assisting when an interpreter is required. That is when the matter is complex or involves technical or legal matters beyond your expertise. In this situation assistance is provided by telephone through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS phone 131 450) or an on-site interpreter organised through TIS (phone 1300 655 082 free of charge, using Council's customer number, C018809) or the Community Relations Commission (CRC phone: 1300 651 500, fee applies).
6. To adopt a sensitive and positive attitude towards residents, recognising their language difficulties and respecting their cultural background.
7. To assist in providing information to other employees and Council, to help in the provision of a more effective service to non-English Speaking background customers.
8. To participate in relevant Language Aide meetings and participate in appropriate training as organised by Council.
9. To maintain statistical records of language assistance provided.

I agree to abide by these terms and conditions.

Name:

Department:

Signed: Date

Form to be forwarded once completed, to Community Worker - Multicultural, Community Services. This form will then be placed on the appropriate staff file.

Appendix 3

Language Aide – Application Form

To be completed by the potential Language Aide.

Any information included on this form is private and confidential.

The purpose of this form is to assist the Community Worker – Multicultural and the Director to assess the applicant's suitability as a Language Aide for Waverley Council. Information regarding this application will also be sought from the Section Manager.

Name of Council Staff: _____

Position within the Department: _____

Name of Manager: _____

What is your availability like during work hours to use language skills to answer enquiries from people who have difficulty speaking English?

For the following points, please address the following criteria:

1. Ability to establish rapport and good communication skills.

2. Ability to handle all enquiries in a confidential manner.

3. Ability to convey information to a non-English speaking background customer, with accuracy and an impartial manner.

4. Ability to handle situations in a respectful way showing sensitivity to different cultures.

5. Ability to use active listening.

6. Willingness to undertake the Community Language Allowance Scheme (CLAS) examination.

Signed: Date

PRIVACY:

Waverley Council will only collect personal information we need to carry out our lawful activities and/or to provide services you have requested. The personal information supplied on this form is required by Council to work out your suitability as a Language Aide. This information may also be used to generate management reports.

This information will be stored on your personal file, in the Pay Office, or in Archives. Only your immediate supervisor/manager, your Director, the General Manager and Employee Services staff have access to this information. You have the right to access this information at any time, as per Council's Personal & Staff Position File Procedures. As per the Award, if you wish to delete or amend any record on your personal file, you will need to request this in writing.

Form to be forwarded once completed, to Community Worker - Multicultural, Community Services. This form will then be placed on the appropriate staff file.

Appendix 4

Language Aide – Nomination and Assessment - Sheet No.1

To be completed by the Manager / Supervisor of the potential Language Aide.

The purpose of this form is to assist the Community Worker - Multicultural and the Director of the respective Department to determine the suitability of a worker as a Language Aide.

Please note questions in this form do not relate to the community language skills. These will be tested externally. Language Aides assist with enquiries of no longer than 15 minutes. For longer or complex enquiries, professional interpreters must be used.

Name of Council Staff:

Position within the Department:

Name of Manager:

Please mark on the scale below, how you would rate the potential Language Aide:

1. in their availability to attend counter inquiries and occasionally other Council locations when required for Language Aide services?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Any comment?

-
2. in their communication skills?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Any comment?

-
3. on understanding and adhering to matters of confidentiality?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Any comment?

-
4. on their understanding and practice of respect and sensitivity for different cultures?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent

Any comment?

5. in their customer service skills?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

6. in their listening skills.

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

I recommend this person as a Language Aide Yes No

Manager's Name

Signature Date

Please return this completed form to the Community Worker - Multicultural, Community Services, who will forward a copy to the Director of the Department. This form will be placed on the appropriate staff file.

Appendix 5

Language Aide - Annual Review Assessment - Sheet No. 2

To be completed by the Manager / Supervisor of the Language Aide.

The purpose of this form is to assist the Multicultural Worker and the Director to review the ongoing suitability of a worker as a Language Aide.

Name of Council Staff:

Position within the Department:

Name of Manager:

Please mark on the scale below, how you would rate the person being assessed for Language Aide services:

1. in their ability to attend counter enquiries and occasionally other Council locations when required for Language Aide services without undue interference with normal duties?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

2. In their communication skills?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

3. in their ability to respect confidentiality?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

4. on their understanding and practice of respect and sensitivity for different cultures?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

5. in their customer service skills?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

6. in their listening skills?

Very Poor	Poor	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent
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Any comment?

7. I recommend that this person continue as a Language Aide Yes No

If continuation is not recommended please provide explanatory comments –

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.....

Manager's Name:

Signature: Date:

Please return this completed form to the Community Worker - Multicultural, Community Services, who will forward a copy to the Director of the Department. This form will be placed on the appropriate staff file.

Appendix 6

Providers of Language Tests

i. COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION (formerly Ethnic Affairs Commission)

Contact: Training Unit, Public Education & Training Ph: 02 9716 2216;

Fax: 02 9716 8319 . Website: www.crc.nsw.gov.au/clas/index.htm

Community Language Allowance Scheme (CLAS)

The New South Wales Government's Community Language Allowance Scheme (CLAS) is a fundamental tool in the provision of high quality customer service in a culturally diverse society.

How do you apply for CLAS examination?

Employees interested in sitting for the examination should contact the Community Worker - Multicultural. All candidates to the examination must be nominated by Council.

How much does the CLAS examination cost?

The CLAS examination fee is \$137.50 per candidate, per language and is payable by Council. Examination in languages not normally tested will attract an additional \$55.00 fee. Fees include GST. The list of languages for examination is available in the CLAS information package.

When is the examination held?

The CLAS examination is held in May each year and applications open in March.

For further information, please contact Waverley Council's Community Worker – Multicultural.