



AAH Policy

HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM SUB-BACHELOR COURSES CONSULTATION OCTOBER 2017

The Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Department of Education and Training's consultation on Sub-Bachelor Courses.

Our submission calls for an urgent rethink of elements of the proposed Higher Education reforms which threaten to diminish Australia's vital languages capacity, specifically the impact on the Diploma in Languages from the generic proposal to limit Commonwealth supported sub-bachelor places to courses that articulate with a related bachelor program or address skills gaps.

The Diploma in Languages is an important structural initiative, which has proven highly effective in enabling languages skills development across the university sector.¹ Students enrolled in Bachelor programs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) or humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) currently have the flexibility to study languages at the sub-bachelor level. The Diploma in Languages addresses a recurring complaint about language underperformance in our education system and a gap in provision allowing students in highly structured programs in Law or Medicine, for example, to undertake language study. This is a rich skills development opportunity crucial to Australia's future workforce and its ongoing social and economic security.

The proposed Higher Education Reforms to sub-bachelor courses will act as a disincentive to languages enrolments and ultimately lead to language skills depletion.² At the University of Queensland, for example, there are 200 enrolments (EFTSL) in their Languages Diploma; at the University of Sydney, numbers are in the order of approximately 130 (EFTSL). At the University of Melbourne, of the 450 students (actual numbers) currently enrolled in a Diploma in Languages, 50 per cent are from STEM fields or business and economics.³

In the context of Australia's trade and economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, the Business Council of Australia recognises that skills deficits in languages and cross-cultural skills training are holding us back: "Despite our growing presence in the region, our experience and understanding of the cultures, languages, behaviours and customs of emerging economies in Asia requires continual deepening."⁴ This regional strategic and commercial interest is bolstered by a wider need for languages study to boost humanities scholarship in general, so that it does not need to rely exclusively on publications in English, and hence the Diploma serves to widen the range of languages that can be supported in our higher education sector.

A recent report by the British Council on global education rated Australia highly on almost all measures to the extent that Australia ranks equal first alongside Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Malaysia and the UK on indicators such as openness of higher education systems, quality assurance and degree recognition, and international student mobility. However, Australia under-

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performed – placing 30 of 38 countries – on measures relating to “outbound scholarships and foreign languages provision”.⁵

The Australian Academy of the Humanities supports the submission that the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU) has made on the likely impacts of changes to the Diploma in Languages. We are also aware that Universities Australia and individual universities have made submissions regarding this issue and possible amendments to the eligibility criteria for demand-driven Commonwealth-supported places. The Academy endorses the following recommendations:

1. The Diploma in Languages should be subject to an exemption on the basis that Australia’s languages deficit is a national skills gap and addresses industry shortages.
2. Maintain existing arrangements for Commonwealth-supported places allocated to languages diplomas.

We also support suggestions put forward by the University of Sydney with respect to amending the proposed clause regarding student eligibility to ensure that students studying a Languages Diploma concurrently with, or after completing, another tertiary qualification are able to access CSP funding.

3. Ensure that students with prior higher education completions will be eligible for Commonwealth supported places in an approved sub-bachelor language course.

These suggested amendments to the Higher Education reforms would remove disincentives to languages study – an unintended consequence of the Government’s proposed reforms – and in this way align and reinforce national policy on languages. For maximum success the Department of Education’s initiatives to support school second language study needs to articulate with higher education sector provision. It is clear from the meagre returns from several decades of policy investment in language education that an ‘ecological’ approach is most promising. This means that only when action to support language study is reinforced across diverse but related areas, such as school curriculum, higher education options, training and vocational education and business employment practices, does the take up of languages improve.

The national benefit inherent in having a much larger cohort of Australian young people able to communicate effectively in languages other than English is clear and universally recognised and we strongly encourage the protection of the unique and critically important role of the Diploma in sustaining languages candidatures at university level.

We would be pleased to elaborate on any of the comments made in this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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President

ENDNOTES

¹ Hajek, J. (2014) 'Languages Snapshot, p.22. In G. Turner and K. Brass, *Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences in Australia*, Australian Academy of the Humanities,

<https://www.humanities.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/AAH-Mapping-HASS-2014.pdf>

² Lane, B. (2017) 'Hoj, Mayfield Warn of Language Skills Depletion', *The Australian*, 12 July,

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/hoj-mayfield-warn-of-language-skills-depletion/news-story/347d3959ce50e758ece2838cde20c47b>

³ The data on University of Queensland enrolments sourced from their submission to the Higher Education Reform package consultation (July 2017), University of Sydney figures from their submission to this consultation; and University of Melbourne's statistics shared with the Academy by the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities.

⁴ Business Council of Australia (2013) *Action Plan for Enduring Prosperity Australia*, p.30,

<http://www.bca.com.au/publications/action-plan-for-enduring-prosperity-full-report>

⁵ Ilieva, J. and Peak, M. (2017) *The Shape of Global Higher Education: National Policies Framework for International Engagement*, British Council,

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/f310_the_international_higher_education_report_final_v2_web.pdf