COLLABORATIVE MODELS FOR THE
PROVISION OF LANGUAGES IN AUSTRALIAN
UNIVERSITIES

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Foreword

The study of languages in Australian universities has a long but very chequered history. The discipline of Languages more often than not belongs to the category of small enrolment subjects whose existence is frequently under threat because of financial exigencies affecting the modern university in Australia. Enrolments in languages tend to be subject to strong fluctuations due to such factors as societal perceptions about the usefulness of language study per se, the (un)popularity of certain languages and policy directions. Managing the volatility around the position of languages in universities is generally seen as the responsibility of Deans/Pro Vice-Chancellors in Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. At annual meetings of the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), maintaining, introducing and/or phasing out language programs became a regular topic of discussion: collaboration was seen as key to minimising the (potential) disruptions and uncertainties linked to fluctuations in language enrolments and study. In 2005 DASSH, with institutional support from the University of Queensland, successfully applied to the Collaborative and Structural Reform Fund to explore the potential of collaborative arrangements in the languages area through the development of some models, which would be trialled over a three-year period. This report – Collaborative Models for the Provision of Languages in Australian Universities – presents the findings – warts and all – of this exploration. The report has been written with a range of audiences in mind. They include Heads of language departments who are responsible for daily oversight, planning and implementation of language programs, policy advisers in government relating to language education and higher education who are central in assisting to address structural constraints and barriers for collaborative arrangements. The primary audience though are Deans/PVCs with responsibility for managing language programs – the nature of the report and the majority of recommendations are geared towards this group to assist them in their decision making processes re entering and sustaining collaborative arrangements for languages.

Building upon the findings and recommendations from previous reports of languages in higher education the report focuses on identifying scenarios suitable for collaboration in the languages area and on describing the parameters that need to guide different forms of collaboration including the pedagogical considerations, delivery modes, student management, financial arrangements. The bulk of the report is devoted to the description, discussion and evaluation of the 6 collaborative trials. The results of these trials give a very candid insight into the many difficulties, constraints and barriers affecting collaborative arrangements. Many of these obstacles are structural and sector wide and will need to be addressed mainly at institutional and sectoral level to ensure the sustainability of such collaboration. The trials also reveal the dedication, willingness and inventiveness of many languages staff to overcome systemic problems relating to language collaborations. However without the informed support of Vice-Chancellors, Deans/PVCs their suggestions and initiatives will often not be sustainable. With this report we aim to assist Deans/PVCs in making informed decisions about language collaborations in the hope that this will strengthen the position of languages as a key area of scholarship in Australian Universities.

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Executive Summary

Collaborative arrangements between universities for the teaching of languages are not a recent phenomenon in the Australian sector. However, too many have come and gone mainly due to the absence of a proper framework guiding the introduction as well as the sustainability of such collaborations. Yet the financial climate within which Australian universities operate make collaborations increasingly necessary either as an alternative to closing down language programs or as a fiscally responsible way for the introduction of a new language. Collaboration for the provision of languages is not, however, to be interpreted as the norm, or the routine learning modes for university students. At the same time Australian universities need to ensure that their students graduate with a comprehensive, world-class knowledge portfolio. This requires an obligation to provide and promote a diversity of languages for professional and strategic needs and to reclaim Australia’s reputation as a leader of language education and policy. Given this situation it is desirable for the university sector to examine existing collaborative arrangements as well as develop and trial new ones.

This project, funded by the Collaborative and Structural Reform Fund (DEEWWR) with the support of the Australasian Council of the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), was charged with identifying the conditions under which collaborations or collaborative activities around the provision of languages education in Australian universities best meet the interests and planning needs of various audiences; the academy of language scholars, Deans/PVCs, university managers and administrators, graduates, policy makers. As part of that brief, the collection, analysis and interpretation of archival, survey and interview data provided an account of relevant factors in, inhibitors to and facilitators of, collaborative partnerships for the delivery of language education. Subsequently a number of reports, available on the DASSH website (www.dassh.edu.au), have ensured the dissemination of information about international contexts of collaboration to a range of audiences (Lo Bianco & Gvozdenko 2006), the management and leadership issues involved in setting up and maintaining a collaboration (Hajek et al 2008; Winter 2006) views from language teaching academics about their roles in collaboration (Lo Bianco & Gvozdenko, Winter 2006) as well as information about the place and role of private providers in languages education (O’Phelan 2006).

The nationally coordinated online survey of Australian universities, commissioned as part of this project, provided a profile of languages education and teaching changes over the period 2001-2005. The report (White & Baldauf 2006) found that total student enrolments in languages remained relatively stable in the survey period while in 2005 some 38 languages had not been recently taught in Australian universities (but had been taught previously). The staffing base of university language teachers had declined slightly over the five-year period but more relevantly casualisation of the teaching profile had increased 40%. The cyclical nature of student demand and enrolments saw Arabic, Chinese/Mandarin, French, Latin and Spanish grow significantly during the survey period yet German, Indonesian, Modern Greek, Thai and Vietnamese enrolments contracted.

The innovative component of the investigation was the design, trial and evaluation of different Collaborative Models that could deliver language programs through inter-institutional partnerships and arrangements. The trials of the Collaborative Models took place in various contexts during 2007-2008 and we note that (current and future) reviews of higher education in Australia may change the ‘preference’ of some arrangements discussed in this report. The Collaborative Models – Cooperative Blended Model; Collaborative City-Based Model and the Blended Online & Immersion Model (Version A: domestic; Version B: in-country) – are recommended for partnerships in language(s) provisions in a range of contexts. Not all of the Models have been evaluated as suitable for all languages and teaching programs. The dimensions of each Model do reflect some flexibility but several key dimensions have been recommended to ensure sustainability. The evaluation of the Collaborative Models addressed two key issues:

1. The impact of the Collaborative Model trialled in the provision of languages.
2. The conditions under which the Collaborative Models should/can be included, or not, for language policy and planning in Australian universities.
The key dimensions identified in the evaluation and recommended as necessary conditions under which the Collaborative Models can be applied include:

1. Sound financial arrangements through revenue sharing of institutional income with clear budgeting and distribution reporting to teaching areas.
2. Formalised agreements and documentation with timelines that allow for at least one full cycle of the language offering and identified renewal, review and expiry deadlines.
3. A rationale for the collaboration that considers degree type and course structure, consideration of student demand and cohort, succession planning if long-term collaboration is envisaged and agreed workload accountability for academic and administrative staff.
4. Sophisticated curriculum and pedagogy that addresses the issues of alternative modes of learning for internal students.

The Collaborative Trials involved six case studies; Chinese/Mandarin, Arabic & Italian; Modern Greek; Classics; Indonesian and German. Each Case Study trialled one of the Collaborative Models and involved at least two Australian universities. The Collaborative City-Based Model was not trialled due to its extensive history and currency in Australian universities. A report of the evaluation of the Model, Hajek et al (2008), was utilised in the overall evaluation and in the determination of aspects 1-5 listed above.

As part of the evaluation of the Collaborative Trials the type of language involved – a widely, moderately or lesser-taught one – was considered for its interaction with the model and identified any specific, or limited constraints or facilitators that had enabled the collaboration. In one case, the evaluation of the Cooperative Blended Model— with externally funded options for student scholarships, staffing and travel—highlighted the need to consider the program’s positive impact on the members of that community who might otherwise not engage philanthropically with the Australian Higher Education sector. The Cooperative Blended Model provides a structure for these efforts and can also satisfy the needs of managers and administrators for financial accountability of the arrangements. In another case, the limited success of the trial involving German, a widely taught language showing signs of contraction in student demand, was evaluated as needing greater emphasis on the specific contexts of Honours programs and less to the financially and pedagogically sound dimensions of the Blended Online and Immersion Model (Version A). The model in question was suited to the collaboration from a management and planning perspective but the context of Honours programs needed to be accorded with additional evaluative ‘loading’.

The evaluation of the Case Studies also identified a number of institutional, sectoral or international structures that hindered the application of the Collaborative Models. Recommendations aimed at recognition and hopefully removal of the barriers have been proposed including:

- Consideration of incentives for implementation of collaborations to introduce new languages in Australian Universities
- Consideration of incentives to facilitate language pathways and articulations from secondary to university sector and other post-secondary articulations (e.g. TAFE links)
- Review of (cross-) licensing issues relating to IP and copyright for teaching materials and curriculum adopted in collaborative efforts.

This document is the final report that provides a summary of the reports commissioned as part of the investigation of collaboration; an overview of the Collaborative Models with exemplification of hypothetical scenarios that include financial modelling; discussion and evaluation of each Case Study as well as an overall evaluation of the factors facilitating and/or hindering collaborative arrangements.
Recommendations

All Vice-Chancellors, Deans/Pro Vice-Chancellors and academics consulted during this project emphatically agreed that the attributes, qualifications and employability of Australian university graduates must be competitive in the international arena and that increased engagement with, and qualifications in, languages other than English are vital components of this competitiveness and for global citizenship in general. Most Australian Universities recognise and acknowledge the value-added qualities languages afford their students while at the same time being faced with a need to plan contingencies for resource allocation to language teaching areas and other small enrolment subjects. Articulations of excellence and advantage for students to include language study at the tertiary level must be supported by constructive responses that address issues of study program comprehensibility and languages education, enabling of languages pathways from secondary to tertiary levels, removal of structural barriers to institutional collaboration and the provision of incentives for innovative collaborations to expand the range of languages available to Australian students.

RECOMMENDATION I
That, in the implementation and organisation of collaboration for language(s) provision in Australian universities, the obstacles identified in this Report are explicitly addressed and resolved.

This Recommendation refers to the Cooperative Blended Model, the Collaborative City-Based Model and the Blended Online and Immersion Model (Version A: domestic and Version B: in-country) described and modelled in this report. It is imperative that for the efficient conduct and long-term viability of any collaboration that the following, minimal, conditions are incorporated into the design of the scheme:

- Agreement at the highest level of each university that the collaboration will proceed with the full support of all partners. Agreements to outline intellectual property, licensing, copyright and insurance issues, student access to learning resources, staffing arrangements and student administration.
- Formal contracts and documentation with timelines that allow for at least one full cycle of the language offering with identified renewal, review and expiry deadlines.
- Sound financial arrangements through revenue sharing of institutional income with clear budgeting and distribution reporting to teaching areas. This applies to both 'fee for service' arrangements and cross-institutional situations to ensure, for example, adequate reimbursement for infrastructure and administration costs.
- Preference be given to collaborative models in which students can enrol in their Home universities. In cases of cross-institutional enrolment, agreement for publicising language offerings at all partner universities and explicit consideration of enrolment, timetabling, travel and course credit transfer issues should be addressed so that students are aware of all language offerings and are not disadvantaged by this mode of study.
- A rationale for the collaboration that considers degree type and course structure, consideration of student demand and cohort, succession planning for long-term implementation and workload accountability for academic and administrative staff.
- Sophisticated curriculum and pedagogy that addresses the issues of alternative modes of learning for internal students.

RECOMMENDATION II
That, DEEWR offer incentive grants to Australian Universities that enter into partnerships for the introduction of new languages(s).
Collaborative agreements between universities incur significant start-up costs, but offer significant benefits in the longer term, provided the structural difficulties and complexities identified in this project are recognised and addressed in the initial design of a collaboration. The introduction of a new language, preferably a moderately or lesser-taught language, should be recognised through the incentive device in appreciation for the institution’s role in reclaiming Australia’s (damaged) reputation as a leader in language(s) education.

RECOMMENDATION III
That, in evaluating proposals for language provision partnerships between universities, DEEWR give particular attention to the need to ensure that all languages studied in Year 12 are available in at least one Australian University.

This Recommendation aims to address the current situation where many languages studied at Year 12 level are not available for study at any Australian university. Encouraging multi-university partnerships to deliver language education, particularly in low-enrolment languages, minimises risk and creates incentives for imaginative pedagogical solutions. The creation of a pathway should not depend on the closure of an existing language program where the language in question is a moderately or lesser-taught language. Adoption of this Recommendation would strengthen and broaden Australian graduates’ profiles.

RECOMMENDATION IV
That DEEWR in dialogue with Universities Australia consider a review of (cross-)licensing issues, copyright and IP arrangements – compliance and coverage – for collaboration in the delivery of language education in Australian universities

The Recommendation addresses the major obstacle to efficient, timely and appropriate curriculum and teaching materials delivery in the Collaborative Models in the on-line learning environment. Resources – time, workload, legal expenses – dedicated to these issues were disproportionate to other major activities in the establishment of collaborations. Different institutional arrangements and processes, competitive institutional interest and a paucity of consistent knowledge among senior managers and planners with responsibility for academic education matters impacted the implementation of the Collaborative Models. If Recommendation V were adopted these issues could form part of the terms of reference.

RECOMMENDATION V
That an Australian Virtual Languages Network be established to coordinate language initiatives and collaborations for Australian Universities that includes representation of DEEWR, Ministries of Education, Private Providers of language(s) education and experts in languages education in Australian Universities.

Recommendation V recognises the need for an umbrella body with small-scale expenditure structures but able to transcend the competitive nature of the higher education sector to assist with the implementation of the Collaborative Models. Despite good will and widespread interest to address resource allocation issues linked to the provision of languages, the higher education sector is characterised by competition and individualism. These traits often function as a barrier to collaboration and impact upon the potential and possibilities collaboration offer. A suitable vehicle for the Network could be a sub committee attached to Universities Australia (UA). This is not intended as a ‘watch-dog’ or monitoring role for UA but more for facilitation purposes. The subcommittee would:

- Provide a framework for all collaborative ventures
- Provide some general guidelines and assistance
- Facilitate communication between universities interested in collaborations as well as between universities and DEEWR