

Languages for an Asian Century

About DASSH

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) is the authoritative agency on research, teaching and learning for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH) in Australian and New Zealand universities. DASSH represents Executive Deans and Pro Vice-Chancellors of 45 faculties, with ASSH disciplines representing 33 per cent of full-time students at Australian universities.¹ We welcome the Australian Government's proposed development of an Asian Century Strategy and the opportunity to comment and recommend early actions. In particular our focus, as per the terms of reference, is on initiatives enhancing a 'significant deepening' of Australian's 'engagement with Asia,' subsequently promoting Australia's 'growth, prosperity and security' in the Asian Century.

Introduction

A growing global economy and the influence of Asia on that economy – representing 60 per cent of the world's population and the world's fastest growing region - will increasingly become more important to Australia's cultural diplomacy, as well as future economic prosperity and sustainability in the twenty first century. As a result, Australia's ability to develop trade opportunities, to promote our national interests, to influence our business and diplomatic relationships and to ensure a secure and cohesive multicultural society, will increasingly depend on employees, who have a broad and sophisticated understanding of Asia and its languages.

Developing a generation of Australians, who understand, influence and engage with Asia over the next century, will make a host of demands on the education system that prepares them. It is imperative that we develop a system that not only strengthens students' literacy, numeracy and science skills, but also helps them become global citizens by expanding their knowledge of Asia – its languages, cultures and politics.

'...Asia, because of its proximity to Australia and because of its growth, that will have a hugely more significant impact on Australia and Australia needs to understand it and adapt.'

(James Wolfensohn, former World Bank President)²

Why is Asia so Important to Australia?

The economies of China, India and Japan, are expected to represent at least 50 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2040.³ According to the Australian Industry Group, Asia's share of world GDP is expected to be twice that of Western powers by 2050.⁴ In 2011, China became the second largest economy in the

¹ Calculated from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 'Equivalent FT Load by Discipline by Citizenship Category,' *Higher Education Statistics Data Cube (uCube)*, 2010.

² Rosen, R., *Global Literacies*, 2006.

³ Wilson, W. T., *The Dawn of the India Century*, 2005 as reported by Stewart, V., 'Challenging the Whole Child: Becoming Citizens of the World,' *Educational Leadership*, 2007 64(7), p.8-14.

⁴ Australian Industry Group & Asialink, *Engaging Asia: Getting it Right for Australian Business*, March 2011.

world, accounting for one in five of all manufactured products.⁵ By 2030, China should have approximately 1.4 billion and India 1.07 billion middle class consumers by World Bank standards.⁶ For a country, home to less than 0.5 per cent of the world's population,⁷ the sustainability and future growth potential for the Australian economy, lies in further developing trade with this growing market.

Currently over 30 per cent of Australia's GDP is related to exports, with our fastest growing export partner being Asia - accounting for almost two-thirds of exports and our top five export destinations in 2010-11 (China, Japan, Republic of Korea, India and Taiwan).⁸ International education alone was worth an \$18.5 billion to the Australian economy in 2009-10⁹ with Australia the world's single biggest foreign educator of Chinese students. Chinese students comprise about one-third of all international students in Australia, but we are seeing a fall in enrolments and facing increasing competition, including from non-English speaking countries.¹⁰

As countries develop, services' growth becomes more evident. China's services sector is estimated to already account for over 40 per cent of its GDP¹¹ and will only grow as its middle class increases. Linguistic capacity is key to the services sector since they often require much higher levels of communication than manufacturing, especially in exported services – which include receiving international students and tourists, two of Australia's largest export earners. Both industries rely heavily on Australia's ability to promote itself as a multicultural, tolerant society that welcomes people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The drift towards monolingualism seriously undermines our reputation and the industries, which rely upon trade with China for their success.

A Business Case for Bilingualism

Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken language worldwide while English competes with Spanish and Hindi for second place. In a major study of the role of English in the UK economy, David Graddol concludes that the 'complex international, economic, technological and cultural changes could start to diminish the leading position of English as the language of the world market' and that 'monoglot English graduates face a bleak economic future as qualified multilingual youngsters from other countries are proving to have a competitive advantage.'¹²

Although English is considered the current language of business, its dominance of the internet is in sharp decline. In the mid-1990s, English accounted for 90 per cent

⁵ Rohland, K., *China's New Role in the Global Economy*, World Development Bank, November 2011; Price Waterhouse Coopers as reported by BBC News, '[China to Overtake US and Dominate Trade by 2030](#),' 24 March 2011.

⁶ UN Population Division and Goldman Sachs as reported by Rapoza, K., '[Within a Generation, China Middle Class Four Times Larger Than America's](#),' *Forbes*, 9 May 2011.

⁷ [www.tradingeconomics.com](#), based on data from Worldbank and National Statistics Bureaus, 2010.

⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australia Factsheet*, December 2011 & '[Australian Trade with East Asian](#)', 2010, p.14.

⁹ Harrison, D. 'International education trade falls amid uncertainty,' *The Australian*, 15 December 2011.

¹⁰ Gallagher, S., '[Australia needs a new China strategy](#),' *The Australian*, 27 October 2011.

¹¹ Services value added in China was last reported at 43% of GDP in 2010, according to a World Bank report released in 2011 as reported on [www.tradingeconomics.com](#).

¹² Graddol, D., *English Next*, The British Council, 2006.

of all websites, in 2005 this figure was less than 50 per cent.¹³ In 2000 one-in-two internet users spoke English as their first language but in 2010, only one-in-five users spoke English with the greatest number of users - one-in-three - speaking Chinese, Japanese or Korean.¹⁴ While Anglophone countries continue to experience a shrinking, ageing population, the less developed world – who, speak a first language other than English (LOTE) - will represent most of the future population growth. This changing relative size of the world's populations will further affect language growth and associated services.

Importantly for Australia's research position globally there is an increasing volume of research and technological intelligence published in the major languages of trade and innovation, such as Japanese, Chinese and Korean. Knowledge of the local language still appears to be necessary to tap into global knowledge systems in a timely and efficient manner. A developing trend is the amount of high-value intellectual work moving to countries like China, in the form of research collaborations.¹⁵

'English is important as the world business language, but other languages are used extensively as intermediary languages and businesses are aware of the need for a range of other languages in relationship-building.'

European Commission Report¹⁶

'In today's wireless and virtual world, ongoing business success ultimately rests on personal interaction and nowhere is this more relevant than in an Asian context'

(CPA Australia Chief Executive Alex Malley)¹⁷

'Buy in your native language, sell in the customer's language'

(Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies)¹⁸

Employers across Australia, UK and the US all seem to agree, that learning of a language other than English (LOTE) and cultural understanding are essential to be competitive in the global economy.¹⁹ With over three quarters of the UK's top employers recently surveyed,²⁰ warning that their economy 'is in danger of being left behind by emerging economies such as China, India and Brazil, as a result of young people's horizons not being broad enough to operate in a globalised and multicultural economy.'

¹³ Graddol, D., 2006.

¹⁴ www.internetworldstats.com, Miniwatts Group, 2010; Graddol, D, 2006.

¹⁵ For example, Yale University has three joint research centres with two of China's top universities, Fudan University in Shanghai and Peking University in Beijing. These centres are focusing on biomedical, molecular genetics, agro-biotechnology, micro-electrics and nanotechnology. Yale benefits from their Chinese partners' willingness to underwrite much of the financing, the risk of the new endeavours, with access to the best Chinese talent at much lower salaries than the US; while China benefits by being at the 'global cutting edge of science and technology.' See Gallagher, S., 2011.

¹⁶ European Commission, *Effects on the EU Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, December 2006.

¹⁷ Raggatt M, *'Australians falling behind in Asian language education.'* *Meld Magazine*, 15 February 2012.

¹⁸ Marshall, K., *Making the case for languages*, iSubject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, 2001.

¹⁹ Australian Industry Group, 2011; Think Global and British Council, *The Global Skills Gap*, December 2011; Committee for Economic Development (CED), *Education of Global Leadership*, 2006.

²⁰ Survey of 500 CEOs and board directors from employers representing 9 per cent of UK employees as reported by Think Global, 2011.

Surveys of British exporters, European Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across 29 nations and large US corporations²¹ all show a clear link between languages and export success. All companies show that they are losing overseas business through a lack of skills to overcome language and cultural differences. One third of the US corporations surveyed believed they had failed to fully exploit their international business opportunities, and estimated they lost of \$2 billion a year due to 'insufficient international and cross-cultural skills' amongst their employees. Almost 80 percent of these corporations expected their overall business to increase notably if they had more internationally competent employees on staff.²² A British Council survey showed that 'overall, 39 per cent of business leaders consider it important for potential employees to speak at least one language other than English, but this rises to 72 per cent for those in the field of natural resources.'²³

Australian awareness of the above issue is so lagging that no comparable research has been conducted in this country. We need to recognise that Australian SMEs will find it necessary to do business in the languages and cultural environments of the world's emerging markets and without foreign-language skills and cultural knowledge, they will face greater difficulties exporting to overseas markets. There are many areas of potential growth in the Australian economy, which cannot be realised without foreign language skills.²⁴

While we have not been able to identify quantitative research in this area, anecdotal evidence suggests that Australian business executives lag behind their European peers when it comes to language skills. For instance, the average of 3.9 languages spoken by business executives in the Netherlands is highly unlikely to be true of Australian counterparts.²⁵

Asia-Literacy in Australia

Although one in four Australians were born overseas and over half of the population is descendant from non-English speaking parents or grandparents, Australia has the lowest level of second language skills out of all OECD countries – 78 per cent of Australians speak only English.²⁶ The percentage of Year 12 students graduating with a second language has fallen dramatically from 40 per cent in the 1960s (when it was a pre-requisite to further university study) to 13 per cent in the early 2000s.²⁷ Just 3.5 per cent of Australians speak an Asian language at home,²⁸ 5.8 per cent of Year

²¹ Stevick, L., *BCC Language Survey: The Impact of Foreign Languages on British Business - Part 1: The Qualitative Results*, British Chambers of Commerce, November 2003; European Commission, 2006; CED, 2006..

²² CED, 2006.

²³ Think Global, 2011.

²⁴ For example, it has been suggested that the growth potential for Australia's wine industry would be significant if Australia had more fluent German speakers. Germany is by far the largest importer of wine in the world, yet Australia's top four wine export markets are English-speaking countries. See Høj, P., 'Can we afford to be without multilingualism? A scientist's lay perspective,' *Humanities Australia* No. P.44-53, 2010..

²⁵ Rosen, R., 2006.

²⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, 2006; Raggatt, M., 2012

²⁷ Group of Eight, *Languages in Crisis*, May 2007.

²⁸ ABS, 2006.

12 pupils studied an Asian language in 2009,²⁹ and 10 per cent of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade staff have working proficiency in an Asian language.³⁰

While Australia has had significant exposure to Asia through business, immigration and its Asia Pacific location, observers³¹ highlight a lack of 'Asia knowledge,' cautioning that Australia's capacity to engage with Asia 'is diminishing, not growing.' One of our biggest challenges in the Asian Century will be developing an education system to support Australians to acquire the understanding essential for cultural, economic and strategic well being. The pool of Asia specialists in Australia is shrinking as a result of retirements and the lure of jobs overseas.

A 2010 Asia Education Foundation report, commissioned by the Commonwealth Government, shows the proportion of students at all levels studying one of the four key Asian languages (Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean) had dropped from 24 per cent in 2000 to 18.6 percent in 2008. Although growth in Mandarin bucks the trend, the large majority of these students are believed to be from a Chinese ethnic background.³² A 2011 poll on Australians' attitudes to foreign policy issues found that a over three quarters of respondents believed that it was important for Australia to develop a close relationship with the fourth most populous nation - Indonesia, yet the study of Indonesian language is falling rapidly, and facing extinction in our schools.³³

The Problem with Being Monolingual

Monolingual English native speakers are losing the advantage they had in their own language because English proficiency is becoming a basic skill. Australians are increasingly competing for jobs with people, who are just as competent in English as they are in their own native language. Both large US and UK multinationals often recruit graduates from non-English speaking universities rather than their home institutions, arguing that local students were 'shortchanged in cross cultural experience and linguistically deprived.'³⁴

'Societies which deal in only one language will be in a minority and are unlikely to flourish, nor will they maximise job opportunities for their citizens.' (The Nuffield Foundation, London)³⁵

'As the rest of the world goes about honing their English fluency, monoglot English graduates are failing to reciprocate by learning the languages of our major cultural and trading partners. By putting all of our eggs into the English-only basket, we may run a risk of relative cultural and economic isolation.' (British Linguist, David Graddol)³⁶

²⁹ Australian Council of Educational Research, *Studies of Asia in Year 12*, 2009.

³⁰ Lane, B., '[French Love Affair for DFAT](#),' *The Australian*, 14 February 2012

³¹ Raggatt, M., 2012; Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Maximising Australia's Asia Knowledge*, September 2002.

³² Australia Education Foundation, [The Current State of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean Language Education in Australian Schools](#), 2010

³³ Hanson, F., *Australia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy*, The Lowy Institute, 2011; Asia Education Foundation, 2010.

³⁴ CED, 2003.

³⁵ The Nuffield Foundation, *Languages: the next generation*, 2000.

³⁶ Graddol, 2006.

'It is a disadvantage to not know English, and it is a disadvantage to know only English.'
(Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, University of Melbourne)³⁷

Australian parents support early language learning - in a recent Australian Council of State School Organisations survey, 86 per cent of parents and 60 per cent of students said language study should start in early primary.³⁸ What is critical is not which second language students first learn but that they learn a second language. Local and international literature shows that literacy skills gained in one language can be easily transferred to a second language, even if alphabets are different.³⁹

Industry groups in Australia are also calling for compulsory language study from an early age, especially Asian languages and more integration of Asian history and culture into the general school curriculum.⁴⁰ As the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry claims, the introduction of languages will equip students to 'effectively participate in a globalised world.'⁴¹ Multinationals' success in expanding their operations and increasing their sales in overseas markets depends on their understanding of the culture, language, and customs of local markets. Over 70 per cent of Coca-Cola's profits, for example, come from outside the US.⁴² Employees who demonstrate cultural competence are more likely to be selected for and perform well on global teams, which can lead to greater success and advancement within the organisation. Employers value meaningful international experience such as study abroad, as well as the application and development of the international skills initially learned in the classroom.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Australia has a 'language deficit,' whose precise economic and political consequences have not been analysed or costed. It is nonetheless clear that knowledge of Asian languages is critical for Australia as a nation seeking influence in the region and for Australians as individuals seeking gainful employment in the Asian Century.

To avoid failing current and future generations of students as well as ensuring Australia's future economic competitiveness, we need to start looking at both short-term (in the next five years) and longer-term strategies (five years plus) to ensure our students not only learn major Asian languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean, but also get adequate instructional time learning Asian content, perspectives and issues. Proficiency in the core subject areas of literacy, numeracy and science is certainly important, and our notion of 'literacy' needs to be

³⁷ Høj, 2010.

³⁸ Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Attitudes Towards Study of Languages in Australian Schools*, April 2007.

³⁹ Clyne, M., 'Blueprint for a monolingual and Parochial Australia?' *Languages Education in Australia*, 2007.

⁴⁰ Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Skills for a Nation: A Blueprint for Improving Education and Training 2007–2017*, April 2007 p27; CPA Australia.

⁴¹ Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2007 p27

⁴² Rapoza, 2011.

recast to be not just 'Anglophone literacy' but to take into account the need to create a polyglot population. Asian languages need to be recognised as a core part of Australia's educational system. We need to formulate a long-term educational policy, which will create a polyglot generation, and within that context, promote proficiency for every student in at least one Asian language.

DASSH endorses the development of a high-level policy incorporating teaching of Asian languages and content at schools and universities. This White Paper is not the most appropriate place to discuss specific measures to promote Asian literacy in our schools and universities. However, as mentioned earlier, it is fundamentally important that preparations for the Asian Century recognise the centrality of the role of higher education in creating a polyglot generation, literate in the significant languages of Asia. DASSH would welcome the opportunity to contribute more specific detail about recommendation measures to be included in a long-term strategy. Meanwhile, we urge the Commonwealth Government to develop immediate short-term strategies and national policies, which with careful consideration could be developed at a relatively low cost.

Minister Garrett has recently declared that the \$62 million National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP), which focused on the expansion of Asia-literacy in schools was unsuccessful in delivering on outcomes. In our view no expansion program in school is going to succeed until we address two fundamental problems (a) valuing of language education by school students, their parents and teachers and (b) the availability of substantial numbers of teachers with capacity to teach Asian languages.

Our recommendations below are made with the above two factors in mind:

1. Universalise a language bonus across all universities

We recommend a national language bonus scheme, such as those operating across the Group of Eight universities, [Go8 LOTE Incentive Schemes](#), and in the Victorian University Entrance System (VTAC). Through these schemes, students' entry into universities is facilitated by successful completion of a LOTE at Year 12. It is worth considering specific or additional bonuses for Asian languages to encourage students to study difficult languages, especially where they need to learn a new script. LOTE bonuses provide year 12 students with a clear incentive to study a language as part of their strategy for university entry and without any immediate additional demand on the Federal budget.

2. Require universities to provide Asian Language opportunities for all students:

We recommend that it become a requirement that universities develop curricula that encourage and enable the study of languages in all degree programs. Following are a few suggestions of course structures that have encouraged enrolment in Asian languages.

- **Interdisciplinary degree models:** In 2007, the University of Melbourne and in 2012, the University of Western Australia introduced degree models, which require students to undertake interdisciplinary studies as part of their undergraduate course. Since these models were introduced, enrollments in first year language studies at these universities have increased by between 30-90 per cent across all modern language programs, including Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean.
 - **Concurrent language awards:** Many universities (e.g. Macquarie University) permit students to pursue language awards that allow students to study a second language at the same time as pursuing another undergraduate award. This has the special benefit of turning out scientists, engineers, doctors etc., who are bilingual.
 - **Study abroad programs:** Leading universities, such as Harvard University, have made study abroad a degree requirement in many areas. Across Australia, there are a variety of study abroad support schemes at university level, some government funded. The majority of study abroad students however go to Anglophone nations. These schemes need to be carefully re-calibrated to support study abroad in Asian nations. Even a small injection of funds into carefully designed study abroad programs could have a significant impact in improving Asia literacy as there is mounting evidence of the enormous gains in language and cultural literacy through such immersion in Asian cultural contexts.
 - **UK models for consideration in the long term:** While we do not recommend compulsory language teaching for all universities, it is worth noting, that as of 2011, University College London (UCL) requires every undergraduate student to undertake at least two semesters of LOTE as part of all degree programs. UCL has seen no decline in its student numbers as a result of this policy and according to the proponents of the policy, the UCL policy has led to an increase in the number of language enrolments in high schools in inner-city London. Other universities in the UK are trialing programs, where students are offered a certain number of language units with fee waivers.
3. **Set Asian language targets**
NALSSP targets for increasing Asian language uptake in schools have not been met. We believe however that universities should be invited to set their own language targets and these targets need to be managed and delivered on within the overall funding of universities through the Federal government's 'mission-based [compact](#) and performance funding of universities.'
4. **Fill the Research gap**
Australia has no systematic analysis of what the Asian language deficit in particular and monolingualism more broadly, is costing the nation in terms of real and opportunity costs both financial and political. Much of the lobbying on languages over the last decade has been driven by anecdotal evidence and passionate argument. This research gap needs to be filled so that as a

nation, we can make a realistic assessment of the amount of funding that should be invested in promoting Asia-literacy in a context of competing demands for government funding.

Unless Australia addresses a national language policy, required to become a multilingual nation, we, along with other monolingual Anglophone countries will be faced with significant challenges affecting our future prosperity. An 'Asia-ready' generation of graduates will help not only to ensure the future sustainability of Australia's economy, its political security, its cultural harmony but that young Australians will have global career security and be amongst the global leaders in the Asian Century.

DASSH members, as leaders of the section of the university sector, most engaged in teaching of languages and linguistic and cultural research, are uniquely placed to help develop policies for an Asia-ready Australia and to help educate Australians for an Asian Century.

**Professor Krishna Sen
President**

The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities
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