

**Asian Studies of Association of Australia (ASAA) commissioned report: Asian Languages Enrolments in Australian Higher Education. 2006-7**

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In 2007 survey forms were sent to 39 institutions of higher education requesting EFTSL (equivalent full-time student load) for Asian languages, information about collaborative arrangements, and about any recent changes in the teaching of Asian languages or Asian studies.<sup>1</sup>

Responses were received from 24 institutions: Adelaide, ADFA, ANU, Ballarat, Curtin, Griffith (for 2006 only), James Cook, La Trobe, Macquarie, Melbourne, Monash, Murdoch, QUT, Sydney, Swinburne, UTAS, USA, UNSW, UQ, UTS, UWA, UWS, Victoria U, Wollongong.

The survey reveals some general trends although it must be pointed out that the figures arrived at are estimates based on incomplete information. In cases where 2007 figures were not provided, I have relied on the most recent figures available for each institution. For example, if figures are available for 2005 but not 2007 then the 2005 figures were included in the estimate for each language. In addition, the report of Peter White and Richard B. Baldauf, "Re-examining Australia's Tertiary Language Programs: A Five Year Retrospective on Teaching and Collaboration", Dec. 2006, was consulted. This report is also informed by an ARC-funded Learned Academies Special Projects Scheme in which Anne McLaren is involved, "Beginners' LOTE (Languages Other than English) in Australian Universities: an Audit Survey and Analysis: Report to the Council of the Australian Academy of the Humanities", March 2008).<sup>2</sup> The Beginners' LOTE project focused on 'from scratch' beginners' courses in 10 institutions, including the G08 universities.

General trends:

- Strong growth in Arabic.
- Strong growth in Chinese, but much of this growth from background speakers and international students from East Asia.
- Modest growth for Korean from a small base.
- Marked decline in Indonesian.
- Little growth for Japanese.
- Further declines in languages with small enrolments.

Below the situation for each language is discussed in detail.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Emily Dunn, Ph.D. candidate, Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, for administrative assistance funded by the ASAA.

<sup>2</sup> First Chief Investigator is Professor Colin Nettlebeck, School of Languages, University of Melbourne.

**Arabic:** taught by 5 institutions of higher education in Australia, three of whom responded to this latest survey.<sup>3</sup> White and Baldauf noted that Arabic has grown strongly in the period 2001-2005 (from 78 to 121 EFTSL, up 46%, see Table 2.5). ASAA figures show different figures for 2001 (103 EFTSL). For 2007 the figures reported to the ASAA totalled 184 EFTSL (with the caveat that Deakin and UWS figures were for 2005). ASAA figures show a strong growth in Arabic of 78.64% from 2001-2007. The Beginners' LOTE report also notes a very strong growth in first-year beginners enrolling in Arabic across the country.

**Chinese:** offered at 26 institutions across Australia, 19 of whom responded to this latest survey.<sup>4</sup> White and Baldauf reported that from 2001 to 2005 Chinese (Mandarin) reported a growth of EFTSL from 1031 to 1663, a growth rate of 62%. Chinese is the second largest enrolment language in Australian higher education (White and Baldauf, Table 2.7). ASAA figures report figures of 1308 EFTSL for 2001 and 1711 EFTSL for 2007 (with the caveat that the most recent figures available were used for institutions that did not respond in 2007). This is a growth rate of around 30.8%.

The Beginners LOTE project, which included a study of enrolments at beginners level over time, noted that for the 10 institutions surveyed, Chinese enrolments at beginners level were actually trending downwards (-11.7%), going against the trend of growth in the language overall. As the ASAA has noted in past Federal Budget submissions, this is likely to be due to the large numbers of Chinese background speakers who enter at a more advanced level. One of the ASAA respondents to the 2007 survey noted that almost half of the EFTSL in Chinese at that institution were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese (La Trobe). Anecdotal evidence from other universities confirm that this appears to be a general trend. The University of Melbourne has seen a strong growth in its Mandarin-speaking enrolments in recent years.

**Hindi-Urdu:** offered at 2 institutions (ANU, La Trobe). (USyd had limited availability and reported an EFTSL of 2 in 2007.) ASAA reports 12 EFTSL in 2001, down to 10 EFTSL in 2007, a decline of 16.6%.

**Indonesian:** offered at 20 institutions. Thirteen responses were received from institutions in 2007.<sup>5</sup> As White and Baldauf note, Indonesian was dropped at four universities between 2001 and 2004 (p.11). They report a decline in EFTSL in Indonesian between 2001 and 2005 from 641 to 540 (down 12%, see Table 2.5) and a net loss of 7.45 positions in Indonesian in that same period (p.16).<sup>6</sup> The ASAA reports EFTSL of 628 in 2001 and 478 in 2007 (including most recently available figures for Deakin, Flinders, Griffith, CDU, Sunshine Coast, UNE, UQ and Wollongong). This represents a decline of around 23.8% between 2001 and 2007,

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<sup>3</sup> The five institutions are ANU, Deakin, UMelb, USyd, UWS.

<sup>4</sup> Institutions responding to this year's survey were: Adelaide, ANU, Curtin, Griffith (2006 figures only), La Trobe, James Cook, Macquarie, UMelb, Monash, Murdoch, QUT, USyd, UTas, UNE, UNSW, UQ (2006 only), UTS, UWA, Victoria U. Non-responding institutions were Bond, UCanberra, Deakin, Newcastle, RMIT, UNE, Wollongong, USQ.

<sup>5</sup> ADFA, ANU, Curtin, La Trobe, Griffith (2006 only), UMelb, Monash, Murdoch, QUT, USyd, UTas, UNSW, UWA.

<sup>6</sup> White and Baldauf leave out the Australian Defence Forces of Australia in their estimates.

with many programs very vulnerable. Only five institutions teach more than 30 EFTSL enrolments in Indonesian.

**Japanese:** offered at 32 institutions nationally (in 2007), of whom 22 responded to the 2007 survey.<sup>7</sup> White and Baldauf reported a growth of 4.5% between 2001 (EFTSL 2081) and 2005 (EFTSL 2184). Japanese is the largest enrolment language in Australian higher education (see White and Baldauf, Table 2.7). The ASAA reports an EFTSL of 2102 in 2001 and 2135 in 2007, a growth rate in that seven-year period of only 1.5%.

**Korean** is taught at 7 institutions: ANU, Curtin, Griffith, Monash, UQ, USyd and UNSW).<sup>8</sup> All institutions responded to the 2007 survey (Griffith with 2006 figures). ASAA figures show 137 EFTSL in 2001 and 158 in 2007. This represents a 15.32% increase in Korean in this period.

**Thai** was taught at 2 institutions in 2007 (down from 5 in 2001). These were ANU, and USyd with some complementary students at UTS. ASAA figures report 43 EFTSL for 2001 and 9 for 2007. This represents a decline of around 79%.

**Vietnamese** was taught at 2 institutions (ANU and Victoria University). Both responded in 2007. ASAA figures report an EFTSL of 39 in 2001 (4 institutions) and 9 in 2007 (with 2005 figures for UWS ). These figures represent a decline from 2001 of around 76.9%.

### **Self-reported changes at the institutional level**

Institutions were invited to note changes relevant to the teaching and research of Asia over the past two years. These are summarised below:

*Losses:* Griffith reports on the closing of Thai at the end of 2005 due to declining enrolments and increased costs. Macquarie reports a drop in Chinese language enrolments due to the retirement of a senior lecturer. Murdoch reports two Japanese staff retirements and the ANU a generational turnover in staff with retirements often occurring well before replacements.

*Initiatives:* More students are studying Japanese incountry at Vict U, and Asian languages and studies are now located in different schools with a shift from Asian Studies to International Studies. Wollongong reports the Japanese course has been revamped with more focus on research. UTas reports on the setting up of the Regional Universities Indonesian Language Initiative and their successful Asian Studies program in Shanghai. La Trobe reports on the rapid growth in the number of Chinese background speakers in their program. At QUT the School of Humanities and Human Services was closed down and languages moved to the Faculty of Business under the name of the QUT Language Centre. Chinese is to move from a summer course to a

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<sup>7</sup> Responding institutions in 2007: Adelaide, ANU, Ballarat, Curtin, Griffith (for 2006 only), James Cook, La Trobe, Macquarie, UMelb, Monash, Murdoch, QUT, USyd, Swinburne, UTas, USA, UNSW, UTS, UWA, UWS, Victoria U, Wollongong.

<sup>8</sup> White and Baldauf note 8 sites for this language. UMelb is sometimes considered as a site for Korean but it is only available as a language taught by another institution.

full-semester course. Curtin is introducing new courses in society and culture, together with upper level courses for native speakers and a translating and interpreting unit for each language. Monash notes the growth in Chinese and Korean enrolments and interest in translation studies. At Swinburne it is noted that the Pro-VC wants to introduce Chinese from 2009. At UQ the Asian Language and Culture double major has been cancelled and the Asian Studies single major revised.

### **Conclusion**

In 2007 the parlous state of languages generally in Australia became more widely known with the Go8 report, *Languages in Crisis: A Rescue Plan for Australia*, and the joint *Call for Action* (Nov 2007) by the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Go8 universities, the Australian Council for State School Organisations and the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It is estimated that 90-95% of Australian undergraduates do not undertake any language study and that less than 13% complete a year 12 language program.<sup>9</sup> The lack of strategic thinking about languages and the lack of a 'culture' of language learning are urgent national issues.

Asian languages are very vulnerable within the spectrum of languages taught at institutions of higher learning in Australia. For example, the Beginners' Lote project group estimates that at first year level, the number of Australian undergraduates enrolled in just two European languages (French and Spanish) equals the totals in first year levels of ALL Asian languages. At beginners' level, Spanish is one of the most rapidly growing languages in Australia. The same report notes an overall increase of 12% in European languages at beginners' level and a decline of almost 11% in Asian languages beginners' programs in Asian languages between 2005 and 2007, with decline particularly marked in Indonesian (p.12). The Beginners' LOTE project calls for a higher weighting band for languages (the LOTE sector) to make languages programs more viable but points out that not all institutions pass on the CW weighting to the programs in any case (p.16).

The April PM's Summit includes discussion of Australia's Security, within which one finds mention of 'foreign language learning'. This provides the ASAA with an opportunity to make a submission to the relevant panel of the Summit. I suggest the ASAA Council make specific recommendations to the relevant panel, including the policy recommendations of the Go8 *Languages in Crisis* report, and the argument for greater weighting for language teaching at tertiary level. The creation of a culture of language learning at all levels of the education system in Australia should be the long-term goal of any national policy.

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<sup>9</sup> *Beginners' LOTE* report, p.11.