

30 October 2020

LCNAU Submission to the consultation on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF)

As a professional association of tertiary language scholars, LCNAU does not seek to focus on the detailed operational aspects of the NPILF consultation paper, which it sees as largely the concern of university administrations.

We wish instead to point to the silence of the proposed funding model around the question of preparing job-ready graduates to participate in the global economy. Globalisation as a key concern is mentioned briefly on p. 3 and p. 5 of the consultation paper, but the theme is not developed in terms of the study choices that develop global and intercultural competencies: a skillset that incontrovertibly derives from language study and is recognised by industry as vital for Australia's future (*Skills for a Nation*, 2007, p. 27). The silence around language study is all the more puzzling in that it appears to sit at odds not only with the Minister's National Plan for the promotion of languages but, even more cogently here, with one of the key aims of the Job-ready Graduates Package (JRGP) itself.

At LCNAU, we were delighted to note that Minister Tehan came out strongly in defence of language study during the Press Club address at which the Job-ready Graduates Package was first announced. We greatly welcomed the clear message about the national importance of languages that was enshrined in the greatly enhanced funding arrangements for languages as part of the JRGP.

By leaving the total quantum of funding relatively stable while significantly increasing the Commonwealth's contribution to language courses, the package sent a clear price signal to students about the critical role that language capabilities will play in Australia's political, social and economic future.

It is disappointing, however, that this development was not followed up by the recognition of languages as a national priority area of study in the NPILF framework, as is the case for those STEM+ subjects that, like languages, find themselves much better supported by the Commonwealth in the new JRGP field of education funding bands.

While further recognising the importance of certain fields of study for Australia's future, the NPILF has the additional benefit of ensuring that there are incentives for universities to encourage enrolments in these priority areas, rather than following financial drivers that have the potential to work against the intentions of the JRGP. By increasing the Commonwealth contribution for languages in the JRGP but **NOT** including languages in the

definition of STEM+ in the NPILF, there is thus a risk that languages could be seriously disadvantaged within institutions attempting to maximise the return on domestic student load.

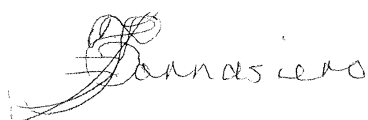
We would argue that the inclusion of languages into the definition of STEM+ would more closely align the NPILF with the JRGP. More than this, however, to include languages in the definition of STEM+ has the potential to reverse the downwards enrolment trend in languages that has long been a source of concern in the Australian university sector. Of the many reports on languages in higher education, the 2007 report *Languages in Crisis* expressed this most forcefully when it highlighted a drop of over 50% in the number of languages taught within a ten-year period (p. 5). Since this report was produced, further closures of language departments have taken place as the financial pressures on universities have intensified.

The Government thus has the opportunity here to do what many past governments and successive schemes have failed to do, namely, to increase Australia's linguistic and intercultural capability. Positive support for languages through the NPILF would also constitute an important step towards the successful implementation of the Government's National Languages Plan and Strategy, at a time when there is already evidence that the current economic situation of Australian universities is leading to increasing uncertainty within small and vulnerable languages departments.

To summarise, we acknowledge and appreciate the expression of support for languages that is evident in the JRGP. The statement in the NPILF discussion paper that the future problems of the world will be ever "more global" also points to the value that the Government places on globally competent students, and thus, implicitly, on language students. As it stands, however, there seem to be no mechanisms in the NPILF to address this increasingly global reality. We consider that the inclusion of languages in the definition of STEM+ in the NPILF would be a major step in this direction, offering institutions explicit incentives to increase enrolments in languages and to begin to reverse the impacts of the many failures of past policies.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Language and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU)



Professor Jean Fornasiero



Professor John Hajek



Professor Greg Hainge