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Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
Parliament House
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I write on behalf of the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU) to express this association's views on the Government's "Immigration (Education) Amendment (Expanding Access to English Tuition) Bill 2020".

Our considered view as a professional association of tertiary language educators is that the Committee should approve the bill.

We consider that the expansion of English language learning opportunities for migrants and their families, whether in Australia or overseas, in preparation for their arrival, is a long overdue reform. We understand the current frustrations of our colleagues working in the field and their conviction that much more needs to be done to remedy the shortcomings of existing programs, not only in terms their content and duration, but also in respect to the eligibility of individuals to access them.

We appreciate that the Government has recognised that these existing shortcomings have been exacerbated by the current health crisis and hence require urgent attention if we are to improve the long term health and employment opportunities for migrant arrivals in Australia.

However, as language educators we would caution against assuming that the proposed legislative changes, welcome as they are, should lessen the Government's duties to engage fully with those many and varied ethnic communities that migrant arrivals represent. The proposal should not obviate the need to communicate crucial messages to them in their own languages, nor should it put up any barriers to full citizenship for those who, through whatever disadvantage or circumstance, may not be able to obtain the new level of "vocational" English outlined in the proposal. This is why the "service" aspect of the bill is vital. If the key aims of the bill in terms of inclusiveness are to be achieved, the recipients of the extended tuition must perceive that is being offered for their greater benefit; if it is accompanied by any undue coercive control or discriminatory effects for those whose level of English is not deemed functional, seeds of resentment will inevitably be sown.

If functional English is certainly a worthy aspiration for the Australian workplace, it is also important to bear in mind that a first language is a form of identity which, if devalued, or discouraged, bears its own lot of issues in terms of health, happiness and social cohesion.

Yours sincerely,

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President, Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU)