

**Subject:** FW: submission

Submission No: ..... 1
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**Sent:** Friday, 9 May 2008 8:31 PM  
**To:** Committee, ISI (REPS)  
**Subject:** submission

Committee Chair Ms Maria Vamvakinou  
INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

Dear Colleagues and Members of the Commonwealth Parliament,

I am very glad you have decided to take up an inquiry into the important issue of Research Training in Australia. I would be grateful if you would regard this letter and the attachments as formal submissions to your inquiry. My concern is with the present structure and funding of foreign language acquisition for Humanities' researchers.

As you will see I work in the somewhat rarified area of Art History, specifically the history of Modern Asian Art. In the past my PhD was on Japanese Foreign Policy and the War in Vietnam and I have also taught Japanese as a language for one year at SOAS, University of London and four years at the University of Sydney. In addition, I have some experience in foreign language study, having learnt Japanese, Chinese, Thai, French and German with varying levels of functional competence.

I have had over the years the occasion to observe the levels of foreign language skill of research students and to know the actual workings of the tertiary educational provision of teaching and funding for language acquisition. I have pointed out many of the problems of these structures in the attached documents which I commend for your careful perusal.

In the Humanities the situation at the moment is that it is *very* difficult for anything other than reading skills in European languages to be acquired by a postgraduate student who does not possess them before commencing research. It is *extremely* difficult for these skills to be acquired in Chinese or Japanese or other Asian languages, and this can only be achieved by the most determined student who effectively works for from eighteen months to two years unfunded to do so.

Native speakers of English have almost no proper provision for acquisition of any language after their undergraduate degree, even the most able Honours students who have won a University Medal. This means that even the best students are discriminated against and that research is concentrated into Europhone or even strictly Anglophone channels.

The attached documents contain detailed arguments and examples. I shall simply summarize three proposals here:

**Proposal A**

That Commonwealth government provision be made for about two hundred special one-year language training postgraduate scholarships for successful APA candidates.

[It would also be possible to increase the number of students covered if a differentiation were made between Asian and European languages].

**Proposal B**

13/05/2008

That the Commonwealth government stipulate certain levels of foreign language competence increasingly be incorporated into undergraduate degree structures, with compulsory language qualifications being set for all students in all disciplines wishing to enter an Honours year.  
That the serious mismatch be recognized between our by now thoroughly multicultural society and the structure of our undergraduate degrees, which do very little to encourage students to acquire foreign language skills.

**Proposal C**

That Australia-wide initiatives be taken to ensure that much higher numbers of students in secondary schools take a foreign language, that is a language other than English and that spoken at home.

Yours sincerely,  
John Clark

**Professor John Clark, FAHA, CIHA, PhD**

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