



Group of Eight

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Go8 releases a plan to rescue foreign language education

The Group of Eight today released its plan to halt the decline in foreign language education in Australia. The Go8 policy paper entitled "Languages in Crisis" aims to put this important issue on the political agenda and promote its solutions for discussion.

"Crisis is not too strong a word to describe the decline in foreign language education in our schools and universities," said Go8 Executive Director, Michael Gallagher.

"Despite many positive efforts from committed teachers and language experts, the percentage of Year 12 students graduating with a second language has fallen from 40 per cent in the 1960s to as low as 6 per cent in some states in Australia today.

"At tertiary level where Go8 universities are responsible for delivering the majority of foreign language education, the number of languages available has fallen from 66 to 29 in the past ten years.

"Our national deficit in foreign language capability is something we can no longer afford to ignore. It is Australia's great unrecognised skills shortage – and the one most directly relevant to our competitiveness and security in an increasingly global environment."

The Go8's paper sets out the trade, economic and security risks of the widely held assumption in Australia that English is the only language we need.

It also recognises that the languages crisis cannot be solved by one sector of the education system alone and proposes a co-ordinated national approach involving schools, community groups, universities and federal, state and territory governments. It recommends, among other measures:

- The staged introduction of compulsory second language education from primary to Year 10.
- The expansion of incentives to encourage the completion of language studies to Year 12 and at university.
- The provision of additional funding to support the current efforts of universities to retain languages and to improve the training and the quality of language teachers.
- A campaign to promote the benefits for Australian society and its individual citizens of multilingualism.

The Go8's paper, "Languages in Crisis: A Rescue Plan for Australia" is available at www.go8.edu.au

The Go8 and the Australian Academy of the Humanities will co-sponsor a National Summit on Languages in Canberra on 7 June. The summit will bring together language teachers and representatives from business, government and the media and will call for bipartisan support for simple, effective measures to utilise and develop our national language capacity.

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