

**ASAA COMMISSIONED PROJECT**

**ASIAN LANGUAGES ENROLMENTS IN  
AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION  
2008-2009**

**Asian Languages Enrolments in Australian Higher Education 2008-9**

**Report commissioned by the Asian Studies Association of Australia**

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## **1. REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- **New programs have opened up in Chinese, and enrolments are up by about a third since 2001 but most new learners are of Asian background.**
- **Numbers in Indonesian have fallen dramatically since the early 2000s and a number of providers have terminated programs in Indonesian.**
- **Japanese has seen a modest increase in enrolments since 2001 and continues to have by far the largest number of enrolments of any Asian language.**
- **Enrolments in Arabic have more than doubled since 2001 from a small base.**
- **Korean and Vietnamese enrolments have grown quite strongly since the early 2000s but are offered in very few institutions.**

## **2. Methodology & Background**

Since 2001 the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) has commissioned surveys on enrolments in Asian language programs in Australian institutions of higher education. Surveys are conducted on a biennial basis and reported back to the President of the ASAA. The last survey was carried out in 2007 and a report submitted to the ASAA (dated April 2008). In 2010 survey forms were sent to the 34 institutions of higher education offering Asian language programs in Australia. Respondents were requested to report on EFTSL (equivalent full-time student load) for Asian languages for the period 2008-9. Additionally they were invited to provide information about collaborative teaching arrangements for Asian languages, any recent changes in the teaching of Asian languages, and staff movements.

Twelve responses were received by mid-year and an interim report was presented at the ASAA Biennial Conference held at the University of Adelaide in July 2010. By December twenty-four responses had been received (after reminder notices). For a list of responding institutions see Table 6 (Appendix).

The analysis below is primarily based on the data provided by the 24 responding institutions in 2009, however, where this would provide an imbalanced report on a particular language, the author has relied on earlier data if available (eg. 2007 language enrolments).

The author has participated in two ARC-funded Learned Academies Special Projects Schemes. The first is "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. This project focused on ‘from scratch’ beginners’ courses in ten institutions of higher education, including a number of Asian languages. The second project focused on issues of retention and innovation in language teaching. It was entitled “An Analysis of Retention Strategies and Technology Enhanced Language in Beginner’s LOTE at Australian Universities”.<sup>1</sup>**

**Discussion of the findings from the 2011 ASAA survey will be informed by the above reports, with additional reference to the 2006 report by Peter White and Richard B. Baldauf, “Re-examining Australia’s Tertiary Language Programs: A Five Year Retrospective on Teaching and Collaboration”.**

**I would like to thank Mr Yuxing Zhou, PhD. Candidate at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, for administrative assistance in carrying out the 2011 survey.**

## **Major Findings by Language**

### **Chinese**

**Chinese language enrolments have enjoyed a growth spurt in many institutions since the early to mid 2000s. This is due to the addition of new providers at tertiary level and also the growth in international students, many of them from the Chinese-speaking regions of Asia. This latter group has become an increasingly important source of student numbers for Chinese programs. In addition, Australians of Chinese-background seek to enhance skills in their heritage language (or learn Mandarin if they are non-Mandarin speakers), and international students from Japan pursue a course in Mandarin Chinese to complement their major course of study. Similar factors are at work in the teaching of Chinese in Australian schools.<sup>2</sup> One university reports a significant growth spurt of 65% in Chinese enrolments from 2001 but that the current enrolment is 62% native speakers from China (La Trobe). It would appear that a significant part of the growth in Chinese numbers comes from the surge in international and heritage-background enrolments, rather than from non-background ab-initio student groups.<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> First Chief Investigator of both projects was Professor Colin Nettlebeck, School of Languages, University of Melbourne. Both reports can be downloaded from the Academy site see <http://www.humanities.org.au/Publications/Overview.htm>

<sup>2</sup> The presence of Chinese-background speakers in the community helps to account for the rise in enrolments in Chinese at school level as well, see the Asian Education Foundation Report, “The Current State of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean Language Education in Australian Schools”: Four Languages, Four Stories”, Carlton South, VIC: Education Services Australia, 2010, p.4

<sup>3</sup> The Beginners LOTE project, which focused on ‘from scratch’ beginners courses, noticed that in the ten institutions surveyed, Chinese enrolments at beginners’ level were actually trending downwards, going against the

**Altogether 28 universities provide courses in Chinese in Australia, some of them on multiple campuses. New players who set up Chinese courses over the past five years include Bond University (commenced Chinese in 2008), Edith Cowan University (commenced in 2009), James Cook University (commenced in 2007), Newcastle (commenced in 2008), The University of Southern Queensland (commenced 2005), the University of Technology, Sydney (commenced in 2006), University of Wollongong (commenced in 2004).**

**Of the 24 institutions who responded to the 2009 ASAA survey, twenty offer Chinese language programs. These twenty institutions have seen a growth of total enrolments in Chinese language from 955 EFTSU in 2001 to 1291 EFTSU in 2009, a growth of 35% since 2001.**

**In the 2000s the largest providers of Chinese were found in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (specifically, UNSW, Sydney, Melbourne, UQ and Griffith. Each of these programs had well over 100 EFTSU. Other major providers are the ANU, Adelaide, Macquarie and La Trobe. Some of these providers have seen substantial increases, even a doubling of enrolment numbers, since 2001 (eg. the ANU). The newer providers understandably have small enrolments, and it will take time for them to reach viability in terms of sustainable numbers.**

**Chinese language providers report that they have sought increasingly to tailor their programs to the needs of both background and non-background speakers, including developing synergies with the campus Confucius Institute (eg. the University of Adelaide). Griffith is finding its translation courses attractive to international students. Chinese is increasingly offered to out-of-Faculty students through concurrent Diploma of Language arrangements (Griffith, UQ). Universities are strengthening or building on their Chinese background speaker programs (Sydney, Macquarie). In some cases, Chinese language enrolments have benefited from structural changes such as a Bachelor of International Studies with a compulsory language major (as reported by UQ). Some providers are able to offer Chinese on multiple campuses (eg. USQ).**

**In this pattern of growth, some respondents report the addition of extra staff (Griffith). The University of Melbourne, which has seen a significant increase in Chinese enrolments, has lost three full-time staff including its professor (30% of its Chinese program academic staff) to voluntary redundancies and retirements since 2008. It is anticipated that one new staff member will be appointed in 2011.**

**Overall, this language has seen significant growth in recent years. However, it is possible, at least in major urban centres, that much of this growth has come from the strength of the international student sector and students of Chinese background in the community. If this**

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trend of overall growth in the language. This is possibly an indication that the enrolments of non-Chinese background students in Chinese is either static or in decline at these institutions.

trend continues, Chinese risks becoming perceived as a 'ghetto' language to be taken only by students of Chinese background. This has unfortunate implications for the Australian community at large, given the rise of China to become Australia's most important trading partner. China offers important opportunities for Australia, and the nation needs the engagement of broad sectors of the community to make the most of these opportunities.

## **Indonesian**

Indonesian was taught in 18 institutions of higher education in 2009 (see Table 2.) This is two less than listed in the previous report (April 2008). A number of institutions have ceased teaching Indonesian since the 2000s (Sunshine Coast, Wollongong, Curtin) or have minimal enrolments (UWS).<sup>4</sup> Previous reports have noted declines beginning in the early 2000s. White and Baldauf found a decline in Indonesian enrolments of 12% in EFTSL from 2001 to 2005, see their Table 2.5) and a net loss of 7.45 positions in Indonesian in that same period (p.16).

The situation since the mid 2000s has been marked by further deterioration in the position of Indonesian. Amongst the 24 responding institutions in 2009, there was a total decline in enrolments from 324 EFTSL in 2001 to 220 in 2009, a fall of 32%. Many major players have seen enrolments fall by half or more over a nine year period. At the ANU numbers are down 50% from a peak in 2004. At Melbourne, enrolments in 2009 have declined 60% since peak enrolment in 2003. At Sydney enrolments have fallen 85% since 2001 (compared with 2009). (However, there are encouraging signs of a pick-up in enrolments at Sydney for the period 2008-9). At the University of Tasmania numbers have fallen by close to half from a peak in 2004. A similar pattern of enrolment decline holds true for UWA from 2001. Due to a decline in enrolments at UNSW, Indonesian will be offered as a minor specialization only from 2009.

In Queensland, the three Brisbane universities (UQ, QUT and Griffith) have established the Brisbane Universities Language Hub (BULH), a federally-funded collaborative venture to integrate the teaching of languages across the three universities. UQ now provides Indonesian and Korean to Brisbane-based universities, while QUT continues to teach Chinese, and Griffith continues to teach Chinese and Japanese on their home campuses. In 2009 both UQ and Griffith report very tiny enrolments (less than 10 EFTSU each) for Indonesian, whereas in 2001 they both reported healthier enrolments (over 30 EFTSU for both). To counter this, UQ reports a doubling of Indonesian enrolments in first semester 2010. It remains to be seen whether the HUB arrangement will foster the growth of Indonesian enrolments. However, it is a strategy for Brisbane universities to continue to offer otherwise non-viable language programs.

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<sup>4</sup> Griffith and QUT rely on the Brisbane HUB arrangement whereby UQ provides Indonesian for the Brisbane area, see this section.

Flinders University provides Indonesian to students of the University of Adelaide as well as its own campus. Over a nine year period Flinders has managed to maintain stable enrolments in Indonesian. In 2009 Indonesian enrolments were virtually identical to that of 2001 (ie, over 30 EFTSU), but this is down from a peak close to 50 in 2004. At Murdoch, enrolments in 2009 were similar to those of 2001, but have fallen since the peak year of 2004. The University of Southern Qld is able to maintain an Indonesian program with very small enrolments by relying on a 'blended' model of collaboration with UNE. In spite of hardship, there are some new developments, such as the addition of a new Development Practicum in Indonesia to the Development Studies program through ACICIS (at Murdoch).

The severe decline in Indonesian enrolments at school level and the tiny number of students who study Indonesian at Year 12 level (1,311 nationally in 2008) has had severe consequences for higher education, as far fewer domestic students enrol in post Year 12 level Indonesian.<sup>5</sup>

Indonesian is a language of crucial national significance for Australia. However, one can only describe the picture for Indonesian as dire. Indonesian enrolments in Australia's largest programs have declined year by year from the mid 2000s. Murdoch University's Professor David Hill is mounting a major ARC-funded research project to investigate means to revive Indonesian.<sup>6</sup> The issue has drawn some media attention recently, with an editorial in *The Age* citing "the neglect of university language departments" for the difficulty Victorian schools experience in running language programs. In that state teacher shortages are reported for Indonesian and Japanese.<sup>7</sup>

## Japanese

Japanese was offered at 27 institutions of higher education in Australia in 2009 (see Table 3). This is one less than in the April 2008 report (due to the impact of the Brisbane HUB). Overall, the 24 responding institutions in 2009 saw a rise from 1649 EFTSU in 2001 to 1801 EFTSU in 2009, a rise of 9.2%.

The general pattern is of a more or less 'steady state' situation with enrolments, with either a slight decline or a slight increase. In the case of a few smaller providers, numbers have declined significantly. In other cases, enrolments in Japanese reached a peak in the early 2000s and then declined moderately thereafter. Bond University commenced its Japanese

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<sup>5</sup> For this figure and information on Indonesian in schools see the AEF Report, "The Current State of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean Language Education in Australian Schools", p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Lane, "Plan unable to save study of Indonesian", *The Australian* Higher Education Wed Feb 16, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> "Without teachers, we'll still be lost for words", *The Age*, Editorial, Feb 2 2011, p.14.

program only in 2008 and has healthy enrolments but is concerned about the high rate of attrition. This is a common problem across Asian language programs.

In some institutions, a decline in enrolments in recent years has led to loss of staff. Griffith reports that three Japanese staff were made redundant due to budget cuts and reduced enrolments. UNSW also reports a decline in enrolments from a peak in 2002.

Melbourne has seen a substantial increase in Japanese enrolments, due largely to the impact of the Melbourne Model with its compulsory “breadth” component (that is, a requirement to do out-of-Faculty subjects). Many non-Arts students have taken advantage of the “breadth” component to enrol in a language. But attrition rates remain high. The substantial increase in Melbourne’s enrolments from 2001 to 2009 could account for a large proportion of the national 9.2% increase reported above for this period.

The University of Qld has also seen a very substantial increase in enrolments in Japanese from 2003 on. UQ points to various stimulatory factors, such as bonus-ranking points for high school language students, a new concurrent Diploma of Languages and the compulsory language major in the Bachelor of International Studies. Swinburne has also seen an uptake in Japanese enrolments. Structural changes have encouraged students to take up the subject. For example, now all students at Swinburne are able to take a minor in a language. Japanese is studied by many students of business as part of their degree. Scholarships are also provided for students to study Japanese in Japan and numbers in the Asian Studies Tour have doubled in recent years. This subject attracts many language and business students. Enrolments are also increasing at the University of Tasmania, which is an important provider of trained language teachers, funded by the Commonwealth government under the National Asian Languages & Studies in Schools program. Macquarie has had a recent spurt in enrolments in Japanese in 2009 and 2010.

## **Other Asian Languages**

### **Arabic**

Arabic is offered at five higher education institutions in Australia (see Table 4). Arabic has enjoyed strong enrolment growth throughout the twenty-first century. Three institutions teaching Arabic responded to the 2010 survey (ANU, Melbourne & Sydney). At these universities Arabic increased from a total EFTSU of 55 in 2001 to a total EFTSU of 133 in 2009 (an increase of 142%).

The ANU has seen enrolments increase six-fold from a very small base. At Melbourne and Sydney enrolments have come close to doubling between 2001 and 2009. New staff have



been hired in Arabic at these institutions. At the University of Sydney one person has retired but two new staff were appointed, resulting in a complement of three staff in Arabic.

Respondents did not comment on the extent to which the sharp surge of enrolments in Arabic is due to interest by students of Middle Eastern heritage background. This is a topic which awaits further analysis.

### **Indian languages: Hindi-Urdu, Sanskrit & Pali**

Hindi-Urdu is taught at the ANU, Sydney and La Trobe. The largest program is at the ANU (10 EFTSU in 2009, the same as in 2001). The University of Sydney is to terminate its program in Hindi-Urdu after 2009. Sanskrit-Pali is taught to very small enrolments at the ANU, Sydney and La Trobe.

### **Javanese**

Javanese is taught to very small enrolments at the ANU and Sydney. Only the ANU teaches Lao, Persian, Cantonese, Burmese and Tetum, to very small enrolments.

### **Korean**

Korean is taught at seven universities in Australia: ANU, Griffith, Monash, Sydney, Melbourne, UQ and UNSW. All but Monash responded to the 2010 survey. In the six responding institutions in 2009, Korean enrolments rose from 104 EFTSU in 2001 to 136 EFTSU in 2009 (an increase of 30.7%).

### **Thai**

Thai is now only taught at the ANU. Enrolment has declined from 2001 (15 EFTSU to 8 in 2009). Griffith ceased teaching Thai in 2005 due to declining enrolments.

### **Vietnamese**

The largest course in Vietnamese in Australia is based at Victoria University, in Melbourne's inner west, an area with a large Vietnamese community. Enrolments in Vietnamese have quadrupled since 2001. Vietnamese is also taught at the ANU, which has small but steady enrolments.

## **4. Reports of new activities and comments by respondents.**

Collaborative teaching arrangements are now very important for the maintenance of a number of language programs, particularly the Brisbane Universities Languages Hub for the

teaching of Indonesian and Korean and the Charles Darwin University and UNE collaborative arrangements. The ACICIS, which organizes incountry study for credit in Indonesia for national Indonesian providers, offers a model of collaboration for incountry study.

Institutions continue to find innovative strategies to support their programs, attract more students, and offer students more opportunity for interaction with Asian partners. Reforms in course structures can often be important (eg the Diploma of Languages), or offering minor specialties in a language as part of a non-Arts or business degree (such as USQ's Bachelor of Business or Swinburne's Bachelor of Commerce). In the case of Chinese, opening up background learner streams is fundamental in attracting and retaining a diverse student base in this language. Some respondents point to online or distance education initiatives as a means of expanding enrolments (eg. the University of Southern Qld). International students have obviously played a stimulatory role in the expansion of enrolments in Chinese and Japanese. Institutions with Confucius Institutes (CI) are seeking synergies between the activities of the CI and the Chinese language program. Respondents observe that burgeoning incountry studies with scholarships have had a stimulatory effect on language enrolments (RMIT, Swinburne). RMIT additionally notes an increase in students undertaking Asian language proficiency tests.

In many institutions one finds a generational change as some staff retire and are not always replaced. Many language staff in Brisbane universities lost their jobs at the time of the setting up of the Brisbane HUB system (this was particularly true for QUT). Budget restrictions have led to redundancies in some cases, particularly outside of the Chinese and Japanese language programs. Only the latter appear likely to be able to appoint new staff. As pointed out earlier, the loss of teaching staff in Indonesian is particularly acute. The University of Melbourne, for example, has lost its Professor in Indonesian and two other senior staff members since 2008. It is hoped to make one new appointment in 2011.<sup>8</sup>

## 5 Trends and Prospects

In 2007 a report prepared by the Go8 group of universities, "Languages in Crisis: A Rescue Plan for Australia" 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 Beginners' LOTE report, which investigated language programs in 10 leading institutions of higher education in Australia, found that the fastest growing language by enrolment in Australia is

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<sup>8</sup> In addition, the new Director of the University of Melbourne's Asia Institute is a South-east Asian specialist (appointed in late 2010).

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

Spanish. The same report notes an overall increase of 12% in European languages at beginner levels (especially French and Spanish) and a decline of almost 11% in Asian languages beginners' programs between 2005 and 2007.<sup>10</sup> This trend is alarming for the future of Asian languages in Australian higher education.

Two new initiatives in 2010 promise to be of importance in the formulation of new strategies to meet the challenges of the future. The first is the important ARC-funded project led by Professor David Hill to investigate the reasons for the decline of Indonesian and what can be done about this. The second is the new Tertiary Languages Network, led by Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, current President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, a leading expert in language policy at national level. The goal of the TLN, which has received a sizable grant from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, is to provide coordination to the promotion of education in languages within and beyond the university sector.<sup>11</sup> The Dean of the ANU Faculty of Asian Studies, Professor Kent Anderson, is on the steering committee of the TLN.

In conclusion, the need for the ASAA to continue to lobby government and media in order to make the case for the promotion of Asian languages in Australian higher education, is more urgent than ever. In particular, Indonesian programs are in crisis around the country and a national effort is required to ensure their ongoing survival. In Chinese, encouragement for the enrolment of more non-background speakers is of critical importance. Appropriate separation of language streams, which often adds to the cost, is essential to the expansion of non-background enrolments in Chinese. Without pro-active measures, Chinese is in danger of becoming a 'ghetto' language from which people of non-Chinese background feel excluded. The languages of smaller enrolment need further assistance if they are to survive (especially Indian languages, Thai and Vietnamese). The increase in enrolments in Arabic and Korean is very encouraging, but the extent to which these new enrolments comprise native or heritage speakers is unknown.

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<sup>10</sup> Beginners' LOTE report, p.12. The decline was most marked in Indonesian.

<sup>11</sup> See the press release of the Australian Academy of the Humanities  
<http://www.humanities.org.au/Events/Upcoming?NewsDetails.asp?ID=68>

## **Appendix.**

**Table 1. Higher education institutions teaching Chinese (Mandarin) in Australia in 2009**

**\*responded to the 2009 survey**

<p><b>*Adelaide</b> <b>*ANU</b> <b>*Bond</b> <b>Canberra</b> <b>Curtin</b> <b>Deakin</b> <b>*Edith Cowan</b> <b>*Griffith</b> <b>*James Cook</b> <b>*La Trobe</b> <b>*Macquarie</b> <b>*Melbourne</b> <b>Monash</b> <b>*Murdoch</b> <b>*Newcastle</b> <b>*QUT</b> <b>*RMIT</b> <b>*Sydney</b> <b>*Tasmania</b> <b>UNE</b> <b>*UNSW</b> <b>*UQ</b> <b>*USQ</b> <b>*UTS</b> <b>*UWA</b> <b>UWS</b> <b>*Victoria</b> <b>Wollongong</b></p>
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**Table 2. Higher education institutions teaching Indonesian in Australia in 2009**

**\*respondents in 2009**

<p><b>ADFA</b> <b>*ANU</b> <b>Charles Darwin</b> <b>Curtin</b> <b>Deakin</b> <b>*Flinders</b> <b>*Griffith</b> <b>*La Trobe</b> <b>*Melbourne</b> <b>Monash</b> <b>*Murdoch</b> <b>*Sydney</b> <b>*Tasmania</b> <b>UNE</b> <b>*UNSW</b> <b>*UQ</b> <b>*USQ</b> <b>*UWA</b> <b>UWS?</b></p>
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**Table 3 Higher education institutions teaching Japanese in Australia in 2009**

**\*respondents in 2009**

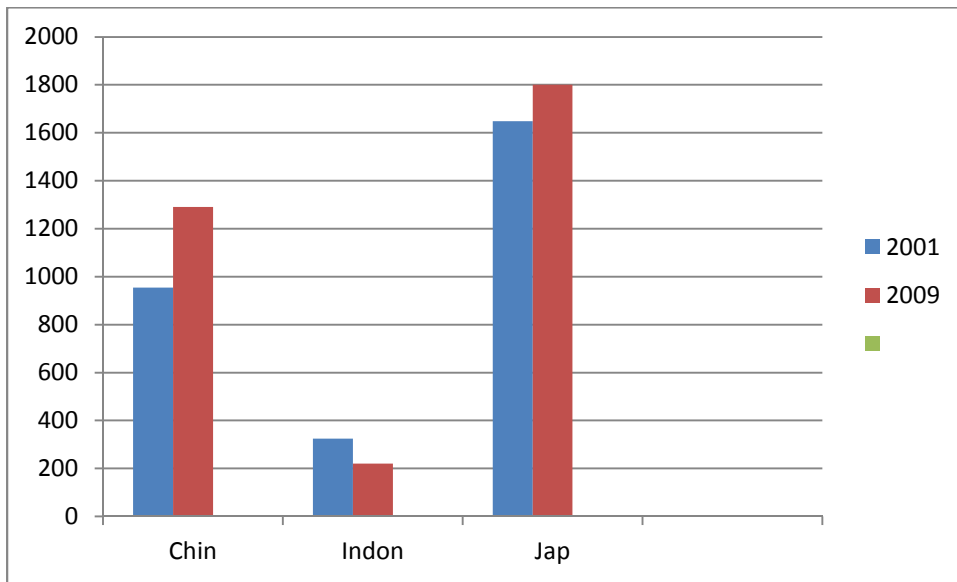
<p><b>*Adelaide</b> <b>*ANU</b> <b>*Ballarat</b> <b>*Bond</b> <b>Canberra</b> <b>Curtin</b> <b>*Edith Cowan</b> <b>*Griffith</b> <b>*James Cook</b> <b>*La Trobe</b> <b>*Macquarie</b> <b>*Melbourne</b> <b>Monash</b> <b>*Newcastle</b> <b>*RMIT</b> <b>*Sydney</b> <b>*Swinburne</b> <b>*Tasmania</b> <b>USA</b> <b>UNE</b> <b>*UNSW</b> <b>*UQ (incl. QUT)</b> <b>*UTS</b> <b>*UWA</b> <b>UWS</b> <b>*Victoria</b> <b>Wollongong</b></p>
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**Table 4 Higher education institutions teaching Arabic in Australia in 2009**

**\*respondents in 2009**

<p><b>*ANU</b> <b>Deakin</b> <b>*Melbourne</b> <b>*Sydney</b> <b>UWS</b></p>
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Table 5. Comparison of Chinese, Indonesian & Japanese total enrolments in EFTSU for 2001 and 2009 in 24 Australian universities.



**Table 6 List of universities responding to the 2010 ASAA Survey.**

<b>Adelaide</b>
<b>ANU</b>
<b>Ballarat</b>
<b>Bond</b>
<b>Edith Cowan</b>
<b>Flinders</b>
<b>Griffith</b>
<b>James Cook</b>
<b>La Trobe</b>
<b>Macquarie</b>
<b>Melbourne</b>
<b>Murdoch</b>
<b>Newcastle</b>
<b>QUT</b>
<b>RMIT</b>
<b>Sydney</b>
<b>Swinburne</b>
<b>Tasmania</b>
<b>UNSW</b>
<b>UQ</b>
<b>USQ</b>
<b>UTS</b>
<b>UWA</b>
<b>Victoria</b>