



# Asian Studies Association of Australia

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Sandy Bay, Tasmania  
[Vice.Chancellor@utas.edu.au](mailto:Vice.Chancellor@utas.edu.au)

Re: Change proposal in the School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania (UTAS)

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) is concerned about the revival of a change proposal in the School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) which threatens to end the teaching of Indonesian and to partially close other language programs.

[There has been plentiful research](#) to suggest that the benefits of learning a second language are immense, but there is a particularly strong case to be made for retaining Australia's collective capacity to teach and learn Asian languages such as Indonesian.

Governments and policymakers in Asia – such as Indonesia, our most important neighbour – are keenly aware of the actions of Australian universities. The closure of Asian language programs risks damaging the reputation of the sector, including that of UTAS in particular, in the eyes of some of the nations that matter most to Australia.

Furthermore, the end of Indonesian language-teaching runs directly counter to the Australian Government's strategic vision for engagement with Indonesia, as outlined in the Plan of Action for the Indonesia–Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (IA–CSP), [to which the government has recently recommitted](#).

The ASAA has been heartened by this announcement, as well as the government's commitment to [invest new funds in community language schools](#), as they suggest a revival in support for the promotion of Asia literacy in Australia.

As our ASAA [report in 2022](#) shows, universities have a central role to play in realising Australia's Asia education imperative. Material support for the teaching of Asian languages is an essential component of this imperative. The change proposal by UTAS will make it harder to realise the goal of retaining Australia's place as a hub of knowledge of Asia.

The proposal must be particularly distressing for the highly adept staff in the language programs at UTAS. The ASAA offers its unreserved support to colleagues who will be affected by the proposed changes. These staff play an essential role in delivery of the Asian Studies programs at the university: they are essential to the continued health of the study of Asia in Tasmania, and in Australia more broadly. Their tremendous efforts have given Tasmanians a rare and valuable opportunity to change their lives for the better by learning Asian languages.

The ASAA strongly urges the Vice-Chancellor of UTAS to reconsider this proposal and to reinstate full support for the Asian language programs (especially Indonesian) and for the Asian studies program at UTAS.

David Hundt

President of the Asian Studies Association of Australia