



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### *Language learning must focus on personal not economic benefits*

The case for increased second language learning in Australia is better grounded in the personal benefits to individual learners than in arguments about economic and social benefits according to a new review of research released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Releasing the review, ACER Chief Executive Professor Geoff Masters said that even limited contact with a second language can have a positive effect by supporting and illuminating students' knowledge of their first language.

"There are significant demonstrated educational benefits from studying a second language from the early years of schooling," Professor Masters said.

The new review, *Second Languages and Australian Schooling* (Australian Education Review 54), authored by University of Melbourne academic Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, traces the history of language learning in Australia, outlines the findings of research from Australia and overseas and proposes a new rationale for language learning policy.

The central argument in the review is for a major improvement in the quality of language teaching across the nation. Professor Lo Bianco argues that, while the single most important variable in second language education is the quality of language teachers, at times the quality of language teaching in Australia has been too low.

"It is an unfortunate aspect of past policy that utilitarian rationales, and the often crisis-driven pressure to establish programs quickly, have resulted in a proliferation of rather superficial second language teaching endeavours."

Professor Lo Bianco believes the promotion of language study by governments as being related to labour market and economic issues has failed to convince students, their schools and parents, that the learning of a second language is worthwhile.

"We must get away from these old conflicts about which languages should be favoured that have dogged the debate for 30 years," Professor Lo Bianco says. "These arguments must be replaced with an educational rationale for major improvements in quality teaching and learning."

Almost 90 per cent of Australian senior secondary students do not study a second language at all. Professor Lo Bianco identifies seven Asian and European languages – Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Spanish – that students should have 'an entitlement to continuation' allowing them to continue studies throughout their schooling.

Joseph Lo Bianco is Professor of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Melbourne. Australian Education Review number 54, *Second languages and Australian schooling*, by Joseph Lo Bianco with Yvette Slaughter, is available for download from the ACER website at <http://www.acer.edu.au/aer>. Print copies can be purchased from ACER Press. Contact customer service on 1800 338 402 or via email on [sales@acer.edu.au](mailto:sales@acer.edu.au)

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Media enquiries:

Louise Reynolds, Corporate Publicity and Communications Manager

Phone: (03) 9277 5582 Mobile: 0419 340 058 Email: [reynolds@acer.edu.au](mailto:reynolds@acer.edu.au)

**Australian Council for Educational Research Limited**

19 Prospect Hill Road (Private Bag 55) Camberwell VIC 3124 Australia

t +61 3 9277 5555 f +61 3 9277 5500 w [www.acer.edu.au](http://www.acer.edu.au)

ACN 004 398 145 ABN 19 004 398 145