Introduction

The establishment of the Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU) in 2011 was predicated on the conviction that high levels of competency in languages and cultures are fundamental for individuals and nations to be able to participate fully in this era of globalisation. For individuals, learning a language is the opportunity to discover a new world, and oneself in the process. For a nation, such as Australia, the strength of its language capacity can, in addition to global benefits of improved intercultural understanding and interaction, open doors for trade and diplomatic relations, enhance its national security interests, increase its economic competitiveness and advance its standing as a leader on the world’s stage. A second underlying conviction was that a major responsibility for enhancing the nation’s languages ability rests with the university sector. It is essentially through research-based university curricula that students gain (or not) the linguistic and cultural knowledge and understanding that they, and the nation, need in order to participate and contribute most fully as global citizens. Just as crucially, universities have the responsibility for training the staff responsible for teaching language and culture at all levels of education.

2011 also saw the staging of LCNAU’s inaugural Colloquium, from September 26-28, which was accompanied by a special Forum and Workshop on September 26 for sessional staff teaching languages and cultures in Australian universities. This Colloquium was both the first gathering of the network, and the creation of a structure to enable ongoing communication and exchange among university languages programs and the staff who are employed within them. Colloquium themes and session formats were designed to give practical opportunities for language and culture academics to explore and develop possibilities for future collaboration in research and teaching-oriented activities. These proceedings showcase the best of the presentations given at the 2011 Colloquium. All submissions were subjected to a rigorous refereeing process to ensure the highest possible quality and we are grateful to our panel of reviewers for their time and expertise.

The inaugural national Colloquium was a great success — despite the very short organizational lead time. Participation was much greater than anticipated — with presenters and attendees drawn from a wide range of language and culture programs (Asian and European), schools, faculties, and universities, as well as other educational organizations. In addition to plenaries, individual presentations, posters and panel discussions, there were also workshops and colloquium-wide discussions of critical issues, including confirmation of LCNAU’s guiding principles (see Appendix). Professor Glenn Withers, CEO of Universities Australia, gave the Triebel Lecture ‘Creating a languages future: How Australia can be world best practice in languages education’ — sponsored by the Australian Academy of the Humanities. There was
significant emphasis placed during the Colloquium on the critical importance of LCNAU to be outcomes-oriented in its activity in every field: it needs to show it can both do things and help to effect positive change and improvement for the sector. These proceedings are a productive example of this approach.

The proceedings have been put together and published in electronic online format, with only a small number of hardcopies also made available. The focus on online publication is specifically intended to facilitate immediate dissemination and access around the world. The volume is arranged thematically, into seven key areas which featured at the Colloquium. Plenary papers are designated (PL) within their thematic category.

**Maintaining the discipline** brings together four important reports which examine issues of great significance to the tertiary languages sector; the first three of these present research initiated by members of the project team responsible for the initial establishment of LCNAU. Dunne and Pavlyshyn (PL) examine changes in languages offerings since 2005, and find that despite an increase in less commonly taught languages (LCTLS), many of these are not institutionally secure. Hand-in-hand with the lack of security for languages programs is the uncertainty faced by the staff who are employed within them. On the basis of a national online survey of sessional staff, Ferrari and Hajek (PL) provide the first data-driven picture of that most vulnerable section of the workforce upon which the tertiary languages and cultures sector has increasingly relied. Nettelbeck, Hajek and Woods (PL) take this issue further, and suggest that the first step in the reprofessionalisation of the sector is accurate mapping, both current and retrospective, of staffing profiles in languages programs across the country. This knowledge, it is posited, will enable the sector better to harness the strength and realize the potential of its staff as leaders, teachers and researchers. Finally, in what is a major contribution to the understanding of the issues involved in the teaching of Asian languages, McLaren examines the use of literature as a medium for teaching ‘critical cultural awareness’ to learners of Chinese, and analyses the complexities surrounding the choice of texts in the multicultural classroom.

**Languages in and across the sector** examines some fundamental issues in the provision of languages and cultures programs in the Australian context. Giacon and Simpson report on the precarious position of Indigenous languages at Australian universities, categorizing the various types of courses on offer and suggesting that recognition of the importance of language revival via language policy and funding could help provide a coherent approach to the vital work being undertaken in many Australian Indigenous languages. A team of language teacher professionals from across the country, led by Harbon, echoes this need for a comprehensive language policy and provides a view of language teacher education over the past 15 years. The group provides discussion of key issues in teacher training, highlighting the need for a more holistic, developmental and long-term perspective in order to prepare teachers for the demands of the globalised era. Indeed, in this era, the internet
plays an increasingly important role in languages education, whether in the actual delivery of programs, or as a source of information about programs. Schüpbach and Hajek evaluate the web presence of language programs in Australia, with a particular focus on Italian programs at 20 universities. In doing so, this study provides a useful example of how best-practice can be examined and applied across the sector.

The exploration and application of best-practice is continued in Models of teaching and learning, with four reports which describe program delivery across a number of Australian universities. Levy and Steel (PL) give an overview of a collaborative arrangement for languages provision among three universities in South-East Queensland, highlighting the range of issues which need to be considered by universities proposing to embark upon similar initiatives. Royer and Grauby describe another collaborative model, this time in the context of interdisciplinary cooperation between departments of the one university. They examine the rationale for co-taught courses, as well as outlining the issues encountered and benefits gained by both staff and students. The next report, by Mullan et al., outlines the peer academic mentoring program established at RMIT University, and posits it as an effective way to enhance the learning experience for all involved. Ohashi and Ohashi continue this examination of the learning experience, suggesting via a study of Japanese programs at two institutions that the process of language learning is more than language acquisition, and entails a process which can inform a student’s discovery of identity.

The experience of students is the central focus of the next section of the volume, Student pathways: attrition and retention. As a reflective piece from a distinguished scholar in the field of languages education in Australia, Forsyth’s report provides an historical context to the understanding of motivation and objectives underpinning the student’s experience of language learning. Martin and Jansen’s examination of the factors influencing attrition and retention is strongly data-driven, being based on the results of a student study undertaken at the Australian National University. Using the construct of ‘language capital’, their findings lead them to reconceptualise categories of students in a way which can help to identify those most at risk of discontinuing language studies. Schmidt’s examination of motives and expectations amongst students of German Studies is based on a nation-wide study and finds that in the context of the diversity and increasing flexibility in university degrees, most such students have similar expectations and motives for learning German.

Student satisfaction with regard to new ways of teaching is examined in three studies which describe the incorporation of Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) in languages programs to maximize learning outcomes. Cordella and Normand-Marconnet describe the findings of an investigation into the use of blogging as a pedagogical tool for developing students’ writing skills; Florez examines the use of wikis for collaborative learning; and Jiang looks at students’ perceptions of a web-diary task. These snapshots of how technology is being used in the tertiary setting are strong indicators of the innovation and creativity which characterize the languages and cultures sector.
The inseparability of language from its cultural context is examined in three reports which feature within the theme of the *Language-culture nexus*. The first, a reflective piece by Freadman (PL), proposes the use of memory studies to reconceptualise pedagogy as culture “knitted into” language. Diaz examines the nexus from the perspective of university policies and philosophies which espouse a commitment to languages education in the context of internationalisation, and finds little correlation between institutional goals for student attributes and actual graduate outcomes. Strambi and Mrowa-Hopkins give a more focused view of the teaching of language and culture; in their discussion of students’ development of intercultural competency during conflict exchanges in Italian, they suggest that activities designed to refine learners’ interpretation and interaction skills are an effective way to develop the awareness, flexibility and tolerance of ambiguity needed for successful intercultural communication.

The final section of the volume focuses on the *Teaching-research nexus*, and features reports which highlight the role of research in the maintenance and development of the language and cultures discipline in Australian universities. Lo Bianco’s (PL) report examines changes to assessments of research impact with the introduction of the most recent Excellence in Research for Australia initiative (ERA 2012), and proposes that an alternative view of research value and impact could incorporate the notion of academic, cultural, citizenship, pastoral and professional responsibilities. Curtis similarly argues that socially innovative research – such as that which he describes in the production and reception of a bilingual anthology of poems by an Indonesian teenager – should have a place in the formal mechanisms for evaluating academic research. Finally, in what may be viewed as a forward-looking piece for the sector, Enomoto discusses a means by which the potential of students as researchers may be developed. Her project, focusing on students of Advanced Japanese, aims to enhance both language-specific and research skills through the production of written and oral research, both in Japanese. It provides a model for enhancing students’ generic skills without compromising discipline-specific skills, and in doing so is able to demonstrate one method by which the graduate attributes espoused in Australian higher education may be attained.

LCNAU is committed to leading the development of a stronger languages culture in higher education in Australia. The collection of studies presented in this volume is intended, through the presentation of some fine examples of research and scholarship in the languages and cultures disciplines, to strengthen the knowledge-base upon which colleagues are working, and to provide the stimulus for discussion and the exchange of new ideas which will enrich and empower the sector. We look forward to continuing to work with languages and cultures academics across Australia to achieve this goal.

*John Hajek, Colin Nettelbeck and Anya Woods (editors)*
Appendix: LCNAU Principles

1. LCNAU embraces the principle of collegiality, and fosters coordinated communication among University languages and cultures academic staff – sessional, contractual and tenured, junior and senior.

2. LCNAU embraces the principles of diversity and inclusion, and the responsibility of promoting and defending them throughout the tertiary sector: it stands in particular for the recognition of the strategic importance of linguistic and cultural diversity within individual institutions and for Australia as a nation. It acknowledges the value of each individual language and culture, and it promotes the greatest possible availability, in Australian universities of a wide range of Australian, Asian, European and World languages. It believes that all students in Australian universities should be able to include the study of languages and cultures in their tertiary experience.

3. LCNAU embraces the principles that tertiary languages and cultures programs constitute a distinctive and important academic discipline and that continuing research is an inalienable dimension of the maintenance and development of the discipline in Australian universities.

4. LCNAU embraces the principle that languages and culture programs, because of their own inherent interdisciplinarity, are well-placed to engage in broad interdisciplinary teaching and research across universities.

5. LCNAU embraces the principle of coherence, in languages programs, of language and culture. It fosters systematic review, reflection and monitoring of improvements in program design and pedagogy for university languages programs, and provides a nation-wide focus for continuous sharing of good practice.

6. LCNAU embraces the principle that student pathways to in-depth study of languages and cultures should be readily available, including through in-country study, so that students can attain high levels of expertise of their field of study, including through higher research degrees; and that students at university should be able to build on knowledge of languages and cultures acquired at school /and or at home.

7. LCNAU embraces the principle of collaboration with language and culture programs in schools and with teacher education institutions, particularly in relation to policy work and program articulation.

8. LCNAU embraces the principles of outreach to other organizations and networks involved in languages and cultures, in order to share information, experience of good practice, new developments and research.