

Professor Bruce Dowton

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The Chancellery
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Professor Chris Dixon

Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts
chris.dixon@mq.edu.au

Dear Professor Bruce Dowton,

Dear Professor Chris Dixon,

I am writing on behalf of COMITES NSW to express our deep concerns regarding the future of the Italian language program at Macquarie University, particularly as it pertains to the Italian community in Sydney. We believe it is crucial to preserve and enhance this educational opportunity for all at your institution.

COMITES (Committee of Italians Abroad) is the representative body of Italian citizens living in New South Wales. It is a group of 12 elected councillors who volunteer for a 5-year term. Part of our mission is to raise and address issues on behalf of all Italo-Australians in New South Wales.

Many people in the Italian community in Sydney as well as students across all faculties have greatly benefited from the Italian language courses offered at your institution. They contribute significantly to the broader multicultural fabric of the university and Sydney itself.

We have now been advised that there is a proposal to disestablish five of the nine languages taught at Macquarie: Croatian, German, Italian, Modern Greek, and Russian. This proposal gravely threatens the teaching of languages at Macquarie University and will severely damage the breadth and variety of languages offered not just at Macquarie but in Australia. Together with the other four languages taught at Macquarie (Chinese, French, Japanese, and Spanish), these languages play a vital part of your institution's curriculum and have contributed significantly to your university's commitment to promote linguistic and cultural diversity, which has been greatly appreciated by the Italian community in Sydney.

In addition to this proposal, it has been suggested that the program of Languages and Cultures should be moved out of the Department of Media, Communications, Creative Arts, Languages and Literature (MCCALL) and merged with other disciplines that do not share a humanities-centred approach. The proposal seemingly aims to reduce language learning to an optional component within a newly proposed program.

We believe that these proposed changes do not take into consideration the socio-cultural implications of speaking a language, as well as the development of analytical skills and pedagogical considerations that take place in the language classroom. As Italians in Australia, we value the essential role language learning plays in developing intercultural communicative competence within and across multicultural communities.

The proposed changes will also undoubtedly have an impact on the occupational opportunities that Macquarie University can provide to its students. In particular, the absence of a pathway for a major in a target language precludes those intending to teach one of the nine languages in secondary schools to do so. Currently, the state's accreditation body for teachers in NSW (NESA) as well as the Department of Education require prospective educators to have completed a major in the language they intend to teach in order to be eligible for the teaching position. Considering the growing population of our metropolitan city and the building of new educational establishments to meet current demand, the proposed changes to the languages offered by Macquarie University risk of depriving students of quality language educators.

We are deeply concerned about the effects that the proposed changes would have not only for the Italian-speaking community in Australia but also for all students at your university. These changes will also seriously undermine your institution's well-deserved national reputation for leadership in languages teaching and research. It is our hope that Macquarie University recognises the significance of preserving this vital educational resource. We kindly request that you consider maintaining and strengthening the Italian Language program at Macquarie.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Dr Luigi Di Martino

President - Com.It.Es. NSW