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## **Bid to rejuvenate Indonesian language learning**

Language experts will gather in Perth this week in a bid to rejuvenate Indonesian language learning in Australia.

Over the past decade, numbers of people studying Indonesian – designated by the Commonwealth Government as a ‘nationally strategic language’ – have been plummeting.

Next week’s three-day meeting at Murdoch University aims to find ways of addressing the problem, which experts say will seriously disadvantage Australia’s relationships with its nearest neighbour in years to come.

Organiser Professor David T Hill, Chair of South East Asian Studies at Murdoch and an expert in Indonesian studies, said that while Government recognised the strategic importance of Indonesian, not enough had been done to actively promote learning of the language at school and university level.

“While Indonesian is still a major language in our schools, research has found that enrolments are declining nationally by an average of 10,000 students every year,” he said.

“The number of university students studying Indonesian has also been declining steadily and relentlessly for the last decade – there was a 30 per cent drop nationally from 2001 to 2009. At least five university Indonesian programs have closed in the last eight years.

“If we do not intervene, the consequence is clear: Indonesian programs will continue to close, retiring staff will not be replaced, enrolments will continue to fall. At the same time, government departments and businesses that recruit Indonesian-speaking graduates are having difficulty securing new staff with advanced language skills.

“Our future relies on our ability to work positively with Asia. If Australia cannot relate effectively to its closest neighbour we will pay a heavy cost in lost opportunities.”

The meeting, the *National Colloquium on the Future of Indonesian in Australian Universities*, will bring together language experts and those who rely on the skills of Indonesian language graduates to discuss ways of increasing the number of people studying Indonesian at university level. Indonesia’s ambassador to Australia, Primo Alui Joelianto, will be among those attending.

With the support of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Professor Hill has produced a discussion paper, designed to spark debate at the event. He sets out 22 ideas for reinvigorating Indonesian language learning, from simply rebranding Indonesian teaching units to make them more attractive to potential students to an Indonesia-based ‘virtual classroom’.

He said: “We hope to develop some concrete strategies for improving the situation. We have to take the initiative, even if that is confronting for us, our colleagues, our universities and for the government which sets education policy. It is in Australia’s national interest to support this.”



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Professor Hill is available for interview – please contact Val McFarlane to arrange.  
Photographs of Professor Hill are also available on request.