



## EVENT BRIEF AND SPEECH

<b>Event</b>	Forum – “Keeping languages in the West: What is the future for the teaching of languages at Victoria University?”
<b>Time</b>	4.00pm
<b>Date</b>	Tuesday, 25 August 2009
<b>Location</b>	Room G470 Victoria University Footscray Park Campus Ballarat Rd Footscray Melways ref – 2S : F4.
<b>Contact</b>	Dr Paul Adams m) 0401 821 903 <a href="mailto:paul.adams@vu.edu.au">paul.adams@vu.edu.au</a>
<b>Host (s)</b>	Friends of Victoria University and Victoria University National Tertiary Education Union Branch
<b>Background</b>	From 2010 Victoria University will begin to transfer its teaching of Chinese, Japanese and Spanish, with the only exception of Vietnamese remaining because Victoria University is the sole provider of a 3-year Major in this language in Australia.
<b>Speech type</b>	Short speech – approximately 3 – 5 minutes
<b>Attachments</b>	1. ECCV Media Release 2. Map of venue



# **PRE-EMPTING THE NEEDS OF TOMORROW**

**4.00 pm, Tuesday, 25 August 2009**

**Room G470 Victoria University, Footscray Park Campus, Ballarat Rd, Footscray**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

<< confirm acknowledgments on the day >>

- Friends of Victoria University
- Victoria University Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and gentlemen

## **INTRODUCTION**

- Good afternoon and thank you for the kind invitation to join this forum.
- And speak on a subject that has long been close to my heart as well as being a central pillar for the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria's policy activities ...
- ... bolstering Victoria's capacity and credibility as a world class multilingual centre.
- Obviously the catalyst for this afternoon's forum was the decision made by Victoria University back in April to transfer the teaching of all current courses in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) elsewhere except for Vietnamese.

- At the time, ECCV issued a Media Release stating our concern that the cutbacks reflected a broader decline in the opportunity to study languages other than English (LOTE) in Victorian tertiary institutions.
- It is a concern I reiterate today.
- While I'm not in a position to second guess the operational status and commercial strategies of Victoria University ... and it is not my intention to do so ...
- ... I do think a broader argument can – and should – be made about a general failure by both the government and the private sectors to keep an eye on the future when it comes to all aspects of social and cultural policy.
- By this, I mean that decisions are overwhelmingly made based on established demand as it stands at the current moment ...
- ... or more often based upon the most recently collated figures which are invariably a year or two old.
- This retro-active practice applies to the design, construction and location of housing.
- The development of vital social service infrastructure around health and care for the vulnerable.
- The instigation of employment programs, traineeships and job creation projects.

- And, yes, the design and implementation of education programs at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.
- The problem is that the rate at which Victoria's population is growing and evolving is so rapid these days ...
- ... that by the time these strategic responses have been scoped, approved, fully-funded, staffed, resourced and enacted, the demand already outstrips capacity or more pressing priorities have emerged elsewhere.
- In short, effective strategising – whether it be establishing a regional senior citizens bus service, or setting a University curriculum – has to be more than responsive to the here and now.
- It has to be pre-emptive of next year ... and the year after ... and the year after that.
- Projective data has to be taken into account.
- For example, I understand that a number of tertiary institutions attribute a dip in demand to their decision to cut back certain courses and education streams.
- This may well be the case.
- Except that a dip is just that – a dip !
- And with a population that is only set to continue expanding and diversifying, and a global marketplace that is only going to become more interconnected and cross-pollinated ...

- ... it seems unduly pessimistic to presume to think that demand will not spike again in a few years time.
- Believe me, as chairperson of a community not-for-profit, I am well aware of the tremendous pressures public and private organisations face in an uncertain economic climate.
- And that tough decisions have to be made – at least in the immediate to short term.
- But there are growing fears that widespread cutbacks to Humanities courses such as foreign languages and cross-cultural studies are not purely motivated by commercial concerns.
- That they come from a belief that teaching of languages other than English isn't a worthwhile exercise.
- I think the fact that today's forum is taking place shows that there are plenty who would argue otherwise.

### **CLOSING**

- Victoria hasn't become the dynamic and culturally diverse state it is today, by looking backward and taking a narrow view.
- It took vision beyond the here and now.
- And the wherewithal to pursue that vision.

- With tertiary institutions like Victoria University spearheading the way.
- At a time of fluctuating fortunes, we must not forget the many thousands of Victorians who have benefited courses teaching languages other than English.
- Class sizes might go up and down from year to year, but the gift they have been given will keep on giving immeasurably.
- Thank you.

### **MEDIA RELEASE : CONCERN CUTBACKS TO UNIVERSITY FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES REFLECT A BROADER TREND**

**30 April 2009**

Mr Sam Afra, Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) expressed concern today that extensive cutbacks to Victoria University's foreign language program reflected a broader decline in the opportunity to study languages other than English (LOTE) in Victorian tertiary institutions.

"The announcement that Victoria University students will no longer be able to study Japanese, Chinese or Spanish on campus is deeply disappointing and already a source of alarm to current and prospective students," Mr Afra said.

On Tuesday it was confirmed that from 2010 only one LOTE course will be on offer at Victoria University – Vietnamese, with arrangements made for Victoria University students of Chinese, Japanese or Spanish to continue their language studies at the University of Melbourne.

"While I appreciate that many tertiary institutions are struggling with increased competition for a shrinking pool of available finances, too often it is Humanities courses such as foreign languages and cross-cultural studies that suffer first and suffer hardest," Mr Afra said

Mr Afra noted that Mandarin and Japanese were among the target languages identified by the Australian Government's own National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP).

"As recently as December last year, the NALSSP was setting a 2020 timeline for one in eight Australian students exiting Year 12 with sufficient fluency in one of these languages to engage in trade and commerce in Asia and/or pursue further university study."

"The obvious question arising from the cutbacks at Victoria University is: where will this expectant surge in bilingual Year 12 students go?"

Mr Afra also expressed concern that shuttling Victoria University LOTE students across to the University of Melbourne was not a viable option in the long term.

"I understand that at the moment, second and third year Spanish students at the University of Melbourne already have to transfer across to La Trobe University's Bundoora Campus to complete their studies," Mr Afra explained.

"So that means from 2010, a Victoria University student wishing to complete an Honours degree in Spanish can expect to hopscotch between three different Universities around Melbourne. Clearly, this is not the most conducive system for living or learning. Nor is it in keeping with the hard-earned image of Victoria as a prime destination for international activity and home to cultural diversity."

Mr Afra said that if Universities needed to explore ways of pooling resources to deliver LOTE courses, then greater effort was needed to ensure the availability of an adequate number and variety of LOTE spaces to meet demand without causing undue inconvenience to students.

***For further information, please contact 0421 124 112.***

# Attachment 2

## Map of Venue

Map reference numbers and letters indicate campus buildings.

