

OUT/2010/00924

1 September 2010

Catherine Gosling
President
AGTV

Dear Catherine

Thank you for your letter outlining the issues with German language teaching in Victorian schools. Obviously I have a personal interest in the promulgation of German language teaching given my own background, but I would also like to outline the reasons why it is important for RMIT (and other universities) to have a strong pool of students proficient in German completing VCE and continuing on to tertiary programs at Victorian institutions.

Germany is a country of significant interest to universities in Australia for a number of reasons. Germany is the home of the modern technological university; it is a research powerhouse and there are many and growing fruitful research collaborations between German and Australian universities. Via institutional links with Germany, Australian universities are also able to access European Union research and student mobility funding opportunities. Student and staff exchanges flourish between the two countries, and German fee-paying students come to Victoria on semester length study abroad programs, contributing to a diversified international student population at our campuses.

Germany is the most important European economy, with great technological & design companies, many of which have a presence here in Victoria. The amount of business exchange and interaction between Germany and Victoria continues to grow, as I plainly saw for myself at the recent Society for Australian German Student Exchange (SAGSE) networking function last week. Some German companies have been sponsoring student exchanges under this program since its inception in 1967, a remarkable commitment to the relationship between the two countries. I am extremely pleased to have been able to commit RMIT to also supporting a student from Victoria to participate in the exchange this year, the first Australian university sponsored scholarship in the Society's history.

RMIT has a broad range of linkages with institutions in Germany - with 16 current partners available for exchange and research collaboration. These institutional linkages allow students to complete a one or two-semester exchange in Germany for study which is credited to their RMIT award at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Exchanges are possible in the fields of engineering, architecture, business, computer science among others. Many institutions in Germany have very close links to industry and this can provide opportunities for project work. An increasing number of RMIT students are now taking the opportunity to experience part of their study in Germany. RMIT also receives a large number of students from Germany on semester exchange in a variety of disciplines.

For many years, RMIT University has run a unique and highly successful program of industry placements known as the RMIT International Industry Experience and Research Program (RIIERP). The RIIERP program provides opportunities for placements of 6 to 12 months with major European and North American industrial enterprises for up to 150 students per year, with about 100 of those students placed in Germany annually. Participating companies include such respected names as Audi, EADS, Airbus, BMW, Robert Bosch, Siemens, Volkswagen and Lufthansa.

Selected participants are able to undertake industry work experience, graduate industry traineeships, student exchange and final-year projects, postgraduate research and postdoctoral research fellowships. Such experiences provide access to sophisticated infrastructure within major companies. The time spent in Germany also allows students to experience the culture unique to the workings of the company where they are placed and impact of that company on the community where it is located. Needless to say the experience also allows for accelerated development of linguistic skills. Students are required to produce a report on these cultural/linguistic aspects on return to RMIT - as well as a report that is academically focused. It obviously helps a great deal if these students have already studied German at high school.

Other opportunities for study experience in Germany include an annual study tour for academic credit in business at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne, as well as a newly established joint program for Master of Engineering (International Automotive Engineering) with the University of Applied Sciences, Ingolstadt. In addition, RMIT has contacts via our various student mobility and research linkages in Switzerland, Austria and Liechtenstein.

It is important for RMIT students to be able to develop German language skills for their study or work placement programs in Germany and other German speaking countries. We do offer opportunities to study German at RMIT via a strategic partnership with the Goethe Institute, but the more students we can attract to RMIT who have already studied German to VCE level, the better it is for them and for us.

I am happy to support AGTV's efforts to ensure that German language teaching remains an integral part of high school curricula in Victorian schools.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Connelly', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

STEPHEN CONNELLY

Deputy Vice-Chancellor International & Development
& Vice-President