



Australian Curriculum Review

Asia Education Foundation Submission

Summary

Parents, government, business and educators agree that study of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is essential in a 21st century Australian Curriculum.

'Within the next five years the Asia Pacific region will be the world's largest producer and consumer of goods and services', says Federal Trade Minister Andrew Robb. 'As a government, our key focus is to do what we can to align Australia's economic strengths with the growing needs of these burgeoning markets.'¹

'In our own region, this means more Australians who can speak Asian languages, catch cultural meanings and navigate local networks. It means starting with children at school' says PM Tony Abbott.²

All Australian governments plan to harness the opportunities of Asia's growth. All agree that building our economies requires Asia capable Australians. The Federal Government's National Strategy to Develop an Asia Capable Workforce requires school leavers prepared for a workplace increasingly oriented towards Asia.³

Business says the lack of Asia capabilities in the Australian workforce is as real a barrier to entry into Asia as tariffs or exchange rates.⁴ Business Council of Australia chief Jennifer Westacott says our 'education and training system plays an important role in increasing the knowledge and understanding Australian students have about Asia and helps to prepare them for the future workforce.'⁵

¹ Positioning Australia for Asia's surge, PwC Melbourne Institute Asialink Index 2013

² Weary Dunlop Address, The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Melbourne, 2013

³ An Asia Capable Workforce Taskforce Report, Asialink, 2012

⁴ Asialink Business Market Research, February 2014

⁵ Australian Financial Review, 10 March 2014

The Australian Council of State Schools Organisations and Australian Parents Council support the need for young Australians to learn about Asia.⁶ Thirty peak education organisations have joined fifteen peak business bodies to promote Asia literacy in schools.⁷

A robust curriculum includes knowledge from the most dynamic civilisations of all time. Many of these originate in Asia. However, research indicates only a tiny proportion of Year 12 students currently study any content about Asia at all.⁸ The Australian Curriculum seeks to re-balance this.

However, an audit of the Australian Curriculum indicates only a small proportion of its content includes Asia. 16 per cent of History content descriptors focus on Asia but 96 per cent are elective. 6 per cent of Geography content mentions Asia. English has 1 per cent. Science and Mathematics have none. 14 per cent of History elaborations mention Asia. Other subjects have less than 10 per cent.⁹

This will require strengthening if the Australian Curriculum is to enable students to be Asia capable by the time they leave school.

Equipping young Australians for their future

An Australian Curriculum must meet the needs of students and the expectations of their parents.

This demands serious consideration of what is required to equip young people for their future. Five-year-olds who start school in Australia today enter their adult lives just at the time China and India become the world's top economies. Our students' future will be shaped by these global geopolitics and shifting patterns of global mobility, trade, technology and youth cultures. In the next decades many of these global changes will be driven by developments in Asia.

The Australian Curriculum's capacity to equip young Australians to participate in a global civil society and to acquire knowledge and skills and understandings of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is therefore of central importance to young Australians and clearly in our national interest.

1 An up-to-date and relevant Australian Curriculum

Australia's engagement with Asia in trade, investment, education, tourism, immigration and humanitarian assistance is growing at a faster rate than our engagement with the rest of the world combined.¹⁰ Australian residents born in Asia doubled in the period 2000-2010. Forty per cent of new migrants to Australia now come from Asia. Hinduism and Buddhism are Australia's fastest growing religions.¹¹

⁶ Media release: Parents unite to build demand for Asian languages and studies, 2011

⁷ http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/policy_and_research/call_to_action_pr/call_for_national_action_plan.html

⁸ Studies of Asia in Year 12, ACER, 2011

⁹ AEF audit of ACARA documents

¹⁰ PwC Melbourne Institute Asialink Index 2013

¹¹ 2013 Australian Census

Trade and Investment Minister, The Hon Andrew Robb AO, makes the point that ‘the phenomenal rise of Asia’s middle class will be a - if not the - defining global characteristic of this century... If current trends continue, within the next five years the Asia Pacific region will be the world’s largest producer and consumer of goods and services... As a government, our key focus is to do what we can to align Australia’s economic strengths with the growing needs of these burgeoning markets.’¹²

One thing all Australian governments agree on is that the future health of our economy is dependent on how well we engage with Asia.

- The Australian Government’s flagship *New Colombo Plan* is designed to strengthen people-to-people relationships with Asia via study and internships undertaken by Australian undergraduate students in the region. To ensure its success the New Colombo Plan requires a pipeline of Asia engaged students entering university from school.
- The *NSW International Engagement Strategy* identifies 10 priority markets. Seven are in Asia.¹³
- The focus of *Beyond our Borders: An International Engagement Framework for South Australia* is on Asia.¹⁴
- The ACT Government has seven action areas to harness the opportunities of Asia’s growth.¹⁵
- Victoria has implemented major strategies for China, India and South East Asia.¹⁶
- WA has built special economic relationships with China, Japan and Singapore.¹⁷
- *The Queensland Plan: A 30-year vision for Queensland*, aims for ‘an abundance of ‘Asia-literate’ businesses, with well-established networks’.¹⁸
- The NT Government has a 10-year Strategic Plan to build Asia capability among young Territorians through school education.¹⁹
- *Tasmania’s Place in the Asian Century* white paper has key directions in trade, investment, education and communication for Tasmanians to engage successfully with Asia.²⁰

There is strong national agreement that building our economies and regional relationships requires Asia capable Australians.

The Taskforce for an Asia Capable Workforce has undertaken recent research with business indicating that Asia capabilities are not a ‘nice to have’ to do business in Asia – they are an essential component of accessing opportunities. Currently, the lack of these capabilities in the Australian workforce is just as real and practical a barrier to entry into Asia as tariffs or exchange rates.²¹

¹² Positioning Australia for Asia’s surge, PwC Melbourne Institute Asialink Index 2013

¹³ www.business.nsw.gov.au/doing-business-in-nsw/international-engagement-strategy

¹⁴ www.dpc.sa.gov.au

¹⁵ www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/479404/asiancenturyact.pdf

¹⁶ www.business.vic.gov.au

¹⁷ Colin Barnett, CEDA State of the State Address, October 31, 2012

¹⁸ www.queenslandplan.qld.gov.au

¹⁹ www.newsroom.nt.gov.au

²⁰ www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/policy/asian_century

²¹ Asialink Business Market Research, December 2013-February 2014

2 Parents, business and government agree that Asia capabilities must start at school.

Prime Minister The Hon Tony Abbott is clear about Asia capabilities. 'In our own region, this means more Australians who can speak Asian languages, catch cultural meanings and navigate local networks. It means starting with children at school.'²²

Parents agree. Australian parents expect their children to leave school with knowledge of the Asia region in order to secure employment in a market different to that of today. The Australian Council of State Schools Organisations and the Australian Parents Council hold a joint policy position that, 'Learning about Asia is an increasingly important part of the personal, social and academic development of all young Australians.'²³

Business Council of Australia chief Jennifer Westacott says our 'education and training system plays an important role in increasing the knowledge and understanding Australian students have about Asia and helps to prepare them for the future workforce.'²⁴

The Australian Government's partnership with the business sector in the National Strategy to Develop an Asia Capable Workforce, places great weight on ensuring young Australians exit schooling with the capabilities to compete in a workplace increasingly oriented towards Asia. Training adults in the workplace will not be sufficient. The next generation must enter the workforce with intercultural capability and knowledge of Asia.²⁵

School educators support this. Thirty peak education organisations including subject, parent and principal associations, joined fifteen peak business bodies including the Business Council of Australia, Australian Industry Group and Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, in an alliance to promote Asia literacy in schools.²⁶

3 A robust Australian Curriculum

A world-class curriculum includes traditional and contemporary knowledge from the most dynamic civilisations of all time. Many of these civilisations have their home in the Indo-Pacific region. These diverse belief systems, philosophies, aesthetics, arts, literature, histories, languages, cuisines and popular culture expand and enrich students' intellectual, personal and creative development. They contribute to young people's ability to build a prosperous, vibrant and socially cohesive Australia and to participate in a global civil society.

However, curriculum in Australia to date has largely ignored the body of knowledge originating in Asia. Research undertaken by ACER shows that only a very small proportion of Year 12 students study any content at all related to Asia in six subjects: English, History, Geography, Visual Arts and Economics.²⁷

The Australian Curriculum seeks to address this. It states that students will learn about the diversity within and between the countries of Asia. They will develop knowledge and

²² Weary Dunlop Address, The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Melbourne, 2013

²³ Media release: Friday 21 October 2011: Parents unite to build demand for Asian languages and studies

²⁴ Australian Financial Review, 10 March 2014

²⁵ An Asia Capable Workforce Taskforce Report, Asialink, 2012

²⁶ http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/policy_and_research/call_to_action_pr/call_for_national_action_plan.html

²⁷ Studies of Asia in Year 12, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2011

understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia and the rest of the world. Students will be equipped with the skills to communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia so they can effectively live, work and learn in the region.²⁸

These are core requirements for a young Australian in the 21st century and essential components of a robust, relevant and futures focused Australian Curriculum.

4 A balanced Australian Curriculum

Inclusion of content focused on Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia will vary between learning areas depending on relevance to core subject content. However, there is a strong case to suggest the curriculum needs to go further in terms of explicit, rather than optional, Asia content.

An audit of the Australian Curriculum indicates that only a very small proportion of the curriculum explicitly mentions content related to the Asia region.

- History has 16 per cent of its total content descriptions focused on Asia. However, 96 per cent of these are elective.
- Geography has 6 per cent of its content descriptions focused on Asia. English has less than 1 per cent. Science and Mathematics have none.
- History has 14 per cent of curriculum elaborations that mention Asia. Other subjects have fewer than 10 per cent of their total elaborations that mention Asia.²⁹

The Australian Curriculum is largely reliant on the cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia to achieve its objective that all students will gain Asia capabilities by the time they leave school.

The cross curriculum design provides teachers with choices, ideas and opportunities for core subject content to be taught with reference to relevant contexts such as Asia. This goes some way towards meeting the need for student Asia capabilities. However, the evidence indicates it needs strengthening if it is to meet this need.

5 Conclusion

There is wide agreement that an explicit focus on Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia is required to meet the needs of our students, their parents and our nation in the 21st century. It is an essential component of an Australian Curriculum that aims to be balanced, robust, relevant and world class.

6 Asia Education Foundation

The Asia Education Foundation³⁰ (AEF) is a joint activity of Asialink at The University of Melbourne and Education Services Australia. It receives core funding from the Australian Government to promote and support Asia studies and languages in Australian schools.

²⁸ ACARA

²⁹ Source: ACARA documents

³⁰ www.asiaeducation.edu.au

AEF works in partnership with national education bodies, state and territory education jurisdictions, education professional associations, schools, universities, business and governments in Asia and Australia.

AEF has built programs and established networks in over 3500 Australian schools. 100,000 Australian school leaders and teachers have participated in AEF professional learning programs – including 3000 educators who have undertaken study programs in Asia.

AEF has an extensive web portal to support teachers and schools to teach about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. The portal includes curriculum resources, professional learning, research reports and the flagship *What Works* series to showcase and share the experience of Asia engaged schools, teachers and classrooms.

AEF works with ACARA and Australian teachers to support the development of the Australian Curriculum.³¹

AEF Advisory Board

1. **Prof Field Rickards – Chair** Dean of Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne
2. **Susan Mann – Deputy Chair** Chief Executive Officer, Education Services Australia
3. **Prof Kent Anderson** Vice President, Asian Studies Association of Australia
4. **Dr David Atkins** Branch Manager, Curriculum and Learning, Commonwealth Government Department of Education
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6. **Michelle Cody** Executive Member, Australian Primary Principals Association
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15. **Rob Nairn** Executive Director, Australian Secondary Principals Association
16. **Helen O'Brien** Nominee, National Catholic Education Commission
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18. **Dr Sonia Sharp** Deputy Secretary, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria
19. **Patrea Walton** Deputy Director-General, Department of Education, Training and Employment, Queensland

³¹ www.asiaeducation.edu.au/aust_curr_strategy_landing_page.html

Attachment 1

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia adds value to learning

The Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority has three key foci. Each of these is central to the interests of all Australian students today. Students will:

- learn about and recognise the diversity within and between the countries of the Asia region
- develop knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia, and the rest of the world
- be equipped with the skills to communicate and engage with the peoples of Asia so they can effectively live, work and learn in the region. [\[7\]](#)

Extensive and high quality curriculum resources have already been developed to support the study of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia in the Australian Curriculum. These are freely available to teachers through Scootle, the Asia Education Foundation web portal and through state and territory curriculum websites.

English

The cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia provides rich, relevant and engaging contexts for developing students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing as they explore and appreciate traditional and contemporary texts from and about the peoples of Asia. They draw on texts that have global historical value as well as those reflecting the dynamism of contemporary Asia. Through the exploration of texts written by Australians of Asian heritage, students understand how Australian culture has been influenced by our strong connections with the Asia region. Students' knowledge of the peoples, countries and texts of the region will influence and enhance their creative pursuits and develop intercultural skills that can be utilised in their future workplaces.

History

The cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia enables students to develop an understanding of the histories of the peoples of Asia and their regional and global contributions. They learn to understand the importance of the traditions, beliefs and celebrations of peoples from Asia and the dynamic nature of socio-political relationships within the region over time. They develop an appreciation of the history of Australia-Asia engagement and how this influences contemporary relationships within Australian society and between Australia and Asia. Combined with intercultural skills, this knowledge enables students to become informed citizens, given the important and ongoing role Australia plays in major events and developments in Asia and vice-versa.

Mathematics

The cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia provides opportunities for students to learn about the understandings and applications of Mathematics in Asia, both historically and in today's world. Students learn that mathematicians from the region have contributed and continue to contribute to the ongoing development of Mathematics. They develop mathematical understanding in fields such as number, patterns, measurement, symmetry and statistics by drawing on knowledge of, and

examples from, Asia. This can provide opportunities to examine issues pertinent to the region, including Australia's engagement with the peoples and countries of Asia.

Science

The cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia provides opportunities for students to recognise that people from the Asia region have made, and continue to make, significant contributions to the development of science understandings and their applications. Students learn that Asia includes diverse environments and that interaction between human activity and these environments continues to influence the region and the rest of the world. They explore the role that people from Asia play in scientific research and development as well as the increasing Australia-Asia collaboration to resolve global issues in medicine, natural resource management, nanotechnologies, communication technologies, and natural disaster prediction and management.

Geography

The cross-curriculum priority provides students with rich contexts to investigate the interrelationships between diverse places, environments and peoples in Asia and to understand why it is an important region in the world. Students develop knowledge and skills that help foster intercultural understanding as they come to appreciate the diversity that exists between and within the countries of Asia, and how this diversity influences the way people perceive and interact with their environments with, at times, global implications. They come to understand that Australia and Asia are interconnected, both environmentally and socially, and that collaborative efforts will foster shared and sustainable futures.

The Arts

The cross-curriculum priority enables students to explore the Arts of Asia and their reflection of the rich and diverse cultures, belief systems and traditions of the peoples of the region. Students examine their significance aesthetically and their impact both regionally and globally. Australia's evolving demography and our positioning in the Asia-Pacific brings with it a variety of cultural, social, and ethical interests and responsibilities. The collective cultural memories that have accumulated around these interests and responsibilities are represented in a diversity of Arts across Australia. Students explore, engage with and respond to art forms, media, instruments and technologies of the Asia region, learning the intrinsic value of art works and artists' practices, as well as their place and value within broader social, cultural, historical and political contexts.

Economics and Business

The cross-curriculum priority provides content and contexts for developing students' Economic and Business knowledge, understanding and skills, including those needed to engage and communicate effectively for employment or doing business in the Asia region. Students investigate the nature, structure and growth of economies in Asia, the diverse ways of conducting business, current and future trade relationships, the role that Australia plays in economic developments in the region, and the contribution of Asian economies to economic and business activity in Australia.

Civics and Citizenship

The cross-curriculum priority provides rich and engaging opportunities for developing students' civics and citizenship knowledge, understanding and skills. By engaging with the

priority, students develop the capacity to understand and appreciate the diversity within Australian society and contribute to harmonious local, regional and global communities. In examining what shapes personal and national identity, students are encouraged to investigate the cultural or religious groups to which Australians of Asian heritage belong. In studying Australian citizenship, students have an opportunity to explore the experiences of people of Asian heritage who have migrated to Australia and taken up Australian citizenship. Students can also reflect on how Australians can participate in the Asia region as active and informed citizens.

Health and Physical Education

The cross-curriculum priority enables students to appreciate and engage with diverse cultures, traditions and belief systems of Asia, and develop interpersonal skills that reflect cultural understanding, empathy, and respect. They examine the meaning of health and the mind-body-spirit connection across cultures in Asia, through wellness practices such as physical exercise and traditions of medicine and healthcare. In doing so, students recognise the influence within Australian culture of traditional and contemporary movement activities from Asia and their cultural significance for Australian society. While exploring health and movement in the region, students develop an understanding of the links between humans, environments and active living practices.

Technologies

The cross-curriculum priority enables students to recognise that interaction between human activity and the diverse environments of the Asia region continues to create the need for creative technological solutions and collaboration with other parts of the world, including Australia. Students explore traditional, contemporary and emerging technologies in the region, applying this knowledge and understanding to create appropriate and sustainable products to meet diverse needs.

Work Studies

The countries of Asia have increasing power and influence in all areas of global endeavour, thus impacting on the world of work. An understanding of Asia underpins the capacity of Australian students to contribute to an Asia capable workforce. Students explore and appreciate the diversity of ethnic backgrounds, cultures and traditions in the Asia region, including Australia. They develop interpersonal skills that reflect intercultural understanding as they build awareness of and respect for the diverse range of beliefs and customs that are important to the peoples of Asia and influence how they work. Students investigate how Asia-related knowledge and skills can contribute to Australia's capacity to engage with the Asia region.