



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Security and Prosperity in Asia

**Building Asia capability in Australia through the education
system and beyond**

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Education

June 2026

CANBERRA

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Terms of reference

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education will inquire into the development of Asia capability within our nation, including the teaching and learning of Asian languages, cultural literacy, and regional engagement within and beyond the formal education system. The inquiry will consider how Australia can build Asia capability across the life course, from early learning through to tertiary education and into the workforce. It will seek to identify system-level reforms and structural enablers that may support development of Australia's Asia capability.

The inquiry will include consideration of:

- structural enablers and barriers to developing Asia capability, including national and state and territory responsibilities under the Constitution, societal attitudes, institutional arrangements, workforce supply and demand issues and availability of national data.
- good practice models for building Asia capability, including through language learning, intercultural understanding, and regional engagement - including immersive experiences and utilising digital technologies.
- the current state of Asian language learning and Asian cultural studies in schools, universities and the community, and strategies to stimulate demand and improve access.
- opportunities to develop and promote the value of Asian cultural literacy, intercultural understanding and Asian diplomacy skills outside of language learning - across schools, universities, communities, the workforce, industry and government.
- expectations for whole-of-government coordination and collaboration, including roles and responsibilities of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Education, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Austrade, Jobs and Skills Australia and state and territory governments.
- other matters the committee considers relevant.



Abbreviations

AAH	Australian Academy of the Humanities
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACBC	Australia China Business Council
Acicis	Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies
ACSSO	Australian Council of State School Organisations
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AFMLTA	Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIG	Australia Industry Group
AIIC	Australia –India Innovation Corridor
ALMA	Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia
ANU	Australian National University
ANU CAP	Australian National University College of Asia and the Pacific
APPA	Australian Primary Principals Association
APS	Australian Public Service
APSC	Australian Public Service Commission
APTA	Australian Professional Teachers Association
ASAA	Asian Studies Association of Australia
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASSA	Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
ASX	Australian Securities Exchange
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank

ATEC	Australian Tertiary Education Commission
BBIP and WILTA	Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth Inc and the Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers' Association
BCA	Business Council of Australia
BRIDGE	Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement
BULA	Brisbane Universities Languages Alliance
CAUSINDY	Conference of Australian and Indonesian Youth
CCLSV	Council of Chinese Language Schools Victoria
CIW	Australian Centre on China in the World
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CLSG	Community Language Schools Grant
CLTAV	Chinese Language Teachers' Association of Victoria
CRF	Commonwealth Reinvestment Fund
CSP	Commonwealth Supported Place
DASSH	Australasian College of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities
Defence	Department of Defence
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DoE	Department of Education
EFTSL	Equivalent Full-Time Student Load
ELF	Endeavour Language Fellowship
Go8	Group of Eight
HASS	Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences
HAT	High Achieving Teachers
Home Affairs	Department of Home Affairs
ICN	Intensive Chinese Network

IEAA	International Education Association of Australia
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ISA	Independent Schools Australia
JLTASA	Japanese Language Teachers Association of South Australia Inc
JRGP	Job-Ready Graduates Package
LCNAU	Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities
LOTE	Languages Other Than English
LTANT	Language Teachers' Association of the Northern Territory
LTAT	Language Teachers Association of Tasmania
NALSAS	National Asian Language Studies in Australian Schools
NALSSP	National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program
NCP	New Colombo Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OS-HELP	Overseas Higher Education Loan Program
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SASAA	South Asian Studies Association of Australia
SIC	South Indian Community
SICLE	Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education
SSP	Statement of Strategic Priorities
UQ	The University of Queensland

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 2.57** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a 10-year National Asia Capability Strategy that recognises Asia capability as a vital sovereign capability. This strategy should be developed in consultation with the Department of Education, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Department of Defence, and state and territory governments.

The strategy should designate a Commonwealth department with responsibility for building Australia's Asia capability and allow for the responsible Minister to make an annual statement to Parliament on Australia's Asia capability and progress on implementation of the strategy.

Recommendation 2

- 2.58** The Committee recommends that the National Asia Capability Strategy designate Asian languages in two groups for the purposes of Commonwealth policy and programs:

- **Priority Languages**, comprising Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, Hindi and Japanese, attracting direct Commonwealth investment, including through Asia Leader Schools, Asian Language Hubs, nationally strategic language protections in Commonwealth Grant Scheme agreements, the ATAR bonus, and targeted teacher supply measures.
- **Supported Languages**, comprising initially Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and South Asian community languages including Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Bengali, supported through nationally coordinated curriculum development and accreditation, community language program alignment, recognition through the National Languages Digital Passport, and teacher accreditation pathways.

The Strategy should publish the criteria for designation and review the designations every five years, including a pathway for supported languages to be designated as priority languages.

Recommendation 3

- 2.66** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government through the National Report on Schooling establish a National Data Framework and Dashboard on Asia capability to track participation levels and assess capabilities across the education system.

The schools component should be developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority; data on higher education should be provided by the Department of Education and the Australian Tertiary Education Commission.

The National Data Framework and Dashboard should include data on the following:

- School level data on participation rates in Asian languages by year level, senior secondary completions, and continuity of language study between year levels.
- Enrolment and completion rates of Asian language study in higher education providers.
- The number of students undertaking and completing honours and higher degree research programs in Asian language and/or cultural studies.
- The number of higher education providers offering courses and degrees in Asian language and cultural studies.
- The level of in-country and immersive experiences undertaken by students in secondary and tertiary education.
- The representation of Asia capability in Australia's senior leadership, including Asian-Australian representation on ASX 200 boards and executive teams, in the Senior Executive Service of the Australian Public Service, and in university governance, drawing on existing data collections where available.

Recommendation 4

- 3.193** The Committee recommends that the Ministers participating in the Education Ministers Meeting establish a working group on building Asia capability in schools to:

- Coordinate consistent pathways for the study of priority Asian languages through primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Australia.
- Reprioritise and practically support the classroom delivery of the 'Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia' cross-curriculum priority in schools.
- Monitor and report on the delivery of priority Asian languages in schools through the National Data Framework and Dashboard.

Recommendation 5

- 3.204** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in collaboration with the states and territories, establish a new program of Asia Leader Schools for priority languages.

These schools would act as a hub of best-practice for language education for schools in their region and build ties with nearby universities to improve education pathways for students.

Recommendation 6

- 3.206** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government treat an urgent Indonesian language schools intervention package as a first-order priority, with elements sequenced as follows:

- as the first element, funding for one full-time position in each state and territory Indonesian language teacher professional association, to reduce the administrative load carried by volunteers, coordinate mentoring of early-career and pre-service teachers, and provide early warning of program closures and teacher supply risk
- designation of the first tranche of Asia Leader Schools for Indonesian, prioritising schools with demonstrated, sustained senior secondary provision
- a one-off investment in contemporary Years 3 to 12 Indonesian curriculum resources, developed jointly with the Indonesian Government where possible
- expanded bilateral cooperation with Indonesia on teacher supply, including national extension of the Western Australian language assistant model and a review of visa settings for language teaching assistants.

Recommendation 7

- 3.211** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish an Australian Schools in Asia (ASIA) Consortium.

The ASIA Consortium would provide Australian schools access to a ready built infrastructure for school-level in-country experiences, ensure program quality and student safety across jurisdictions, and reduce administrative burden for schools and teachers.

The functions of the ASIA Consortium should include responsibility for:

- Identifying, vetting, and maintaining relationships with partner schools and ensuring partners meet Australian expectations for student safety, educational quality, and cultural exchange.

- Developing standardised program models aligned with Australian Curriculum requirements.
- Organising travel logistics such as group insurance arrangements, visa coordination, transfers, accommodation and other logistical and administrative support.
- Delivering pre-departure preparation for teachers and students.
- Maintaining 24/7 emergency response capability and crisis management protocols.

Recommendation 8

- 3.215** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments, tertiary admission centres and universities to implement a nationally consistent five-point ATAR bonus for students who complete a priority Asian language in Year 12.

The bonus should operate within the existing differentiated language streams (first language, background language and second language) so that it rewards genuine language acquisition across all learner backgrounds, and its design should draw on the experience of the Victorian LOTE bonus scheme.

Recommendation 9

- 3.216** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government collaborates with the relevant state and territory university admissions bodies and universities to design and establish credit pathways to university for students completing a priority Asian language in Year 12.

Recommendation 10

- 3.219** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in collaboration with state and territory governments, work towards the availability of a bilingual Mandarin Chinese education at the secondary school level in catchment areas where there is a bilingual Mandarin Chinese primary school.

Recommendation 11

- 3.222** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in coordination with state and territory governments, support programs for existing teachers and educators who already possess South Asian language capability to acquire the skills needed to teach these languages at Australian schools.

Recommendation 12

- 3.228** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government designate places in the Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships and High Achieving Teachers Program to individuals with a specialisation in a priority Asian languages and/or Asian studies.

Recommendation 13

- 3.229** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review skilled visa requirements for the teaching profession and language teacher aides and work with the relevant state and territory counterparts to examine the English proficiency requirements for overseas trained teachers.

Recommendation 14

- 3.235** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government collaborates with the relevant state and territory teacher accreditation and registration bodies, including the Australian Institute for Teaching and School and Leadership, to assess the level of Asia-focused content in teaching degrees and consider mandatory minimum levels of Asian content in teacher education programs.

Recommendation 15

- 3.236** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establishes an Asian Language Intensive Program to enable pre-service and current teachers to develop specialisation in an Asian language.

Recommendation 16

- 3.237** The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade establish an education stream and introduce an education fellow within the New Colombo Plan program.

Recommendation 17

- 3.243** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provides funding to professional teaching associations and networks to support the initial and ongoing professional development of Asia capable teachers.

This should include funding for:

- Permanent staff of teaching associations and networks.
- Support to establish a national network of expert mentors for pre-service and in-service teachers.

- The development of curriculum resources.

Recommendation 18

- 3.245** The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, through Education Services Australia, evaluate and develop guidance on AI-assisted language learning tools, building on the ELLA platform.

Recommendation 19

- 4.182** The Committee recommends that the Australian Tertiary Education Commission include Asia capability in its Statement of Strategic Priorities.

Recommendation 20

- 4.183** The Committee recommends that the Australian Tertiary Education Commission establish an Asia Capability Compact; a coordinated system-level set of mission based compact obligations that, taken together, guarantee the sustained national provision of priority Asian languages and area studies.

Recommendation 21

- 4.184** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government re-introduce protections for priority Asian languages in Commonwealth Grant Scheme agreements.

Recommendation 22

- 4.185** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review higher education funding structures and develop targeted interventions to support the study of priority Asian languages, countries, and cultures.

Recommendation 23

- 4.189** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, working through the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, establish a network of Asian Language Hubs to guarantee the national provision of, and cross-institutional access to, priority Asian language study.

A Language Hub would be a university designated, for one or more priority Asian languages to:

- Deliver a full pathway in that language from beginner to advanced level, including at least one national intensive program open to enrolment by students of any Australian university.

- **Accept and teach students from other universities (spoke institutions) through a guaranteed cross-institutional enrolment arrangement, with seamless credit transfer**
- **Pair language teaching with area studies content such as history, politics and society, so that students develop deep regional capability and not language skills alone.**
- **Undertake sector outreach and sustain advanced and Honours pathways that feed the national research pipeline.**

To make the network sustainable, the funding arrangements should consider:

- **Ensuring a Hub is funded for the students it teaches from other institutions rather than penalised for doing so, by resolving which institution holds the Commonwealth Supported Place and ensuring the Hub receives the full resourcing rate for cross-institutional teaching.**
- **Giving spoke institutions an incentive to direct students to Hubs while retaining a local teaching presence, such as a local tutor and a viable on-campus cohort, rather than treating the Hub as a replacement for their own capability.**

Recommendation 24

- 4.196 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government designate the study of Asia as a priority research area in the National Science and Research Priorities.**

Recommendation 25

- 4.197 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review funding arrangements for higher degree research programs and post-doctoral research and prioritise Asia related research within existing arrangements.**

Recommendation 26

- 4.201 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue its approach of supporting longer term, language focused in-country study through the New Colombo Plan and consider separate funding program for post-graduate students, and academics to undertake research in Asia.**

Recommendation 27

- 5.83** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establishes a National Community Languages Curriculum Alignment program to support and enable the alignment of school based and community-based language curriculum.

In developing the National Community Languages Curriculum Alignment program, consideration should be given to:

- Creating a formal recognition framework for heritage language learning.
- Developing pathways between heritage and community language programs to school-based education.

Recommendation 28

- 5.84** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a National Languages Digital Passport project to provide students with recognition of language progression and attainment.

The National Languages Passport project should track:

- Speaking, listening, reading, and writing proficiency against national benchmarks, and
- Accredited study and immersion hours across community language schools and other immersive language settings.

Recommendation 29

- 5.88** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government in collaboration with the relevant state and territory bodies provide expedited pathways and opportunities for community and heritage language teachers to become qualified teachers in Australia.

The Australian Government should also provide resources and cultural training about Australia for foreign national teachers to support their transition into classrooms.

Recommendation 30

- 5.92** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in collaboration with the states and territories, fund and invest in South Asian language curriculum resources for schools and community languages.

Recommendation 31

6.111 The Committee recommends that Jobs and Skills Australia undertake a comprehensive Asia capability workforce needs assessment to:

- **Quantify current and projected demand for Asia capability across sectors.**
- **Identify specific skill requirements including language proficiency levels, cultural competencies and regional knowledge.**
- **Assess gaps between current workforce capability and projected requirements.**
- **Inform education and training investment decisions through annual reporting on workforce trends.**

Recommendation 32

6.112 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government act as a model employer for Asia capability and consider:

- **Designating Asia capability as a selection criterion in central government agencies.**
- **Developing recruitment targets for Asia capability in Australian Public Service graduate programs and designating positions in graduate programs for Asian language skills.**
- **Providing structured internship opportunities for university students with Asia capability in relevant departments.**
- **Establishing an APS Capability Framework which supports career development opportunities for employees to develop and maintain Asia capability.**

Recommendation 33

6.115 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with schools, universities, and community language educators to provide support and practical guidance for Australians undertaking study, research or extended placements in Asia on how periods of overseas residence and contacts may bear on a security clearance assessment, and on the documentation and preparation that can support a timely assessment on their return.

Recommendation 34

6.119 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government invest in Asia capability education for Australian businesses.



Foreword

Australia faces its most challenging strategic environment since the Second World War. Our security and prosperity are intertwined with our region. China is seeking to reshape the regional balance of power. The United States is pursuing a very different role in the world. Our neighbours in Southeast Asia are seeking new partners to protect their sovereignty and agency. Australia must make its own way in an increasingly complex and consequential region. To succeed in this new world, Australia's leaders and institutions need a deeper understanding of our region's languages, cultures, histories, societies and economies. Asia capability is now a vital sovereign capability.

You would not know this to look at our schools, our universities or our businesses. While Australian statecraft in Asia has never been more active than it is today, the pipeline building the capability that enables it is in crisis.

Australia's Asia capability has not been a whole of government priority for more than a decade. The Commonwealth currently sets no objectives, collects little data and does not seek to coordinate efforts across the Australian education system to build Australia's Asia capability. The Department of Education told this inquiry that it is 'agnostic' as to whether Australian students study Asian languages.

As a result, the institutions that build Australia's Asia capability now face an existential crisis. The statistics are stark. Domestic enrolments in Southeast Asian languages at Australian universities have fallen by 75 per cent between 2005 and 2024. Barely 500 of the one million domestic Australian university students are studying Indonesian language, fewer than when Menzies was Prime Minister.

The situation is even more dire in our schools. Just 3.3 per cent of Australian Year 12 students studied a priority Asian language in 2023, down from 4.7 per cent at the time of the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper. The number of Year 12 Indonesian students across Australia fell from 1,160 in 2010 to 486 in 2024. In Queensland, Indonesian is already functionally extinct. Over the past 15 years, only two schools have consistently taught a Year 12 or combined Year 11 and 12 class in Indonesian. In 2026, just four students across the state were projected to sit a Year 12 Indonesian exam.

Expert witnesses have warned this Committee that without intervention, Indonesian language teaching will be functionally extinct in Australia by 2031, within the next term of parliament.

This imminent threat should be a shock to the Australian political system. It is often said that there is no country more important to Australia than Indonesia. If this is so, there is no country more important for Australia to understand than Indonesia. Instead, we are on track to lose the sovereign capability to teach the language of our northern neighbour. The consequences will be immediate. In their addresses to this Parliament, Indonesian Presidents Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo both pointed to the importance of Australian students learning Bahasa Indonesia for the bilateral relationship.

What will the next Indonesian President to address this Parliament be left to say about Australia's commitment to that relationship?

Malay/Indonesian is arguably the oldest foreign language spoken on this continent. For centuries before European settlement, Makassan traders worked our northern coasts, and Yolŋu people took their words into their own languages in which words like *jalan* (path), *babi* (pig), and *balanda* (white men, derived from 'Dutchmen') are spoken even today. It would be a striking failure for the nation to lose the ability to teach Indonesian in the 21st century, at the very moment Indonesia matters to Australia more than ever.

The decline in academic study of the region has been similarly precipitous. Just 17 students completed Honours in Chinese studies with language at Australian universities in the five years to 2021. China invests heavily in understanding Australia. Australia's education system is no longer investing seriously in understanding China.

Australia's Asia capability is a prerequisite for an independent foreign policy in our region. Australia has one of the smallest diplomatic corps in the OECD. Our foreign policy think tank community is relatively small and the number of roles focused on Asia is smaller still. While small in number, Australia's Asia experts punch above their weight. But these experts rely on Australia's education system to do the research that generates new, deep knowledge about our region and to train the next generation of experts. The capability of Australia's Asia experts today is the product of investments in Asian languages and area studies within our education system made a generation ago, investments we are not making today.

The Committee heard two justifications for continued inaction. The first was that AI translation tools will make human language learning redundant. AI has made symbol-to-symbol translation much cheaper and easier to access. But AI tools alone do not offer the deeper contextual expertise needed to build relationships of trust and understanding across cultures. As AI commoditises transactional translation, it raises the value of the deeper Asia capability needed to be effective in the region. AI can augment the work of our diplomats, defence planners and business leaders, but it is not a substitute for the human expertise and skills they need to do their jobs. As the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority told the committee, you can give someone a calculator and tell them what to plug in, but they will not understand the mathematics, and they will not know when the answer is wrong.

The second justification for inaction heard by the committee is that the latent Asia capabilities of Australia's Asian-Australian diaspora communities will solve the problem. Australia's Asian-Australian communities are a rich source of implicit Asia capability that has often been underutilised within Australian institutions. But the skills and experiences of Asian-Australians vary considerably from one individual to another based on their differing life experiences. Heritage language capability in particular declines significantly across the generations. Rather than undermining the case for structured learning about Asia in Australia, Asian-Australian families told this Committee that they themselves wanted better access to formal Asian language learning for their children.

One community stands out in this respect. India is now the source of one of our largest and fastest-growing diaspora communities. Yet the child of a South Asian Australian family currently has extremely limited opportunity to study Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali or Tamil at school. Only two Australian universities offer courses in Hindi. The Australian education system should do much more to meet the demand from this community for formal heritage language training.

The incentive structures within the Australian education system will not lead schools or universities to prioritise building Australia's Asia capability without Commonwealth government intervention. Schools are run by states that do not share the Commonwealth's strategic and foreign policy interests in Asia. Universities respond to short-term student demand signals and perverse funding incentives. Neither, left to itself, will produce the sovereign capability Australia needs.

This inquiry was conscious of the failure of numerous previous inquiries into Australia's Asia capability to make progress on this issue across multiple governments. Past approaches have focused on meeting ambitious targets through broad, but shallow teaching about Asia and Asian languages. This failed to induce demand from students or employers. This report takes a different approach. The recommendations of this report aim for sustainable depth over breadth. It aims to build a minimum viable pipeline for building Australia's Asia capability based on high quality, engaging learning experiences with incentives to keep students moving through it.

A network of exemplar Asia Leader Schools to give students best practice classroom teaching paired with the in-country experiences that build a lasting interest in the region, with an ATAR bonus and university credit pathways to reward students who stick with it. A mission-based compact on Asia capability between the Australian Tertiary Education Commission and Australia's universities, anchored by Language Hubs that protect at-risk programs and guarantee cross-institutional access for students. Clear demand signals from the Commonwealth as the nation's model employer of Asia-capable graduates.

Australians have long known that one day our security and prosperity would depend on our ability to make our own way in Asia. In 1934, when JG Latham led Australia's first trade mission to Asia seeking to open new markets for Australia in the region, he wrote to Australia's High Commissioner that his mission was 'very embarrassed' by its ignorance of the region and its reliance on 'British Ambassadors, Consuls and interpreters'. In the decades that followed, the Garnaut Report, the Rudd Report, the Wesley Report, the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper, the Varghese Report and the Moore Report all repeated the same essential argument. That for Australia to ensure its security and prosperity in Asia, the country needed to lift its Asia capability.

While Asia has grown more important to Australia during this time, governments from both sides of politics have not met the challenge set by these reports. Building Asia capability in Australia requires sustained national policy focus over the long term. The dividends of these efforts, and the costs of inaction, are not realised within a single electoral cycle. Asia capability has always been too difficult to tackle today, and too easy to leave to a future government.

The present moment is different. Past Asia capability inquiries have focused on preparing the nation for a future in which Australia's security and prosperity is determined in Asia. That future has now arrived. At the moment that Australia needs sovereign Asia capabilities more than ever before, the bill for more than a decade of inaction from previous governments is coming due. The times in which Australian governments have been able to leave the challenge of building Asia capability to future governments have passed. Australia finds itself on a burning platform. To sustain Australian self-reliance in our region, we must act now. As a nation we must choose to build the capabilities Australia needs to find its security and prosperity in Asia.

Finally, a personal note. This Committee received hundreds of submissions and heard from dozens of witnesses who have committed their professional lives to helping Australians understand and learn about their region. Australians committed to the idea of an Australia with both the vision and the capability to make our own way in Asia. Sustaining this vision in the face of decades of waxing and waning policy attention has required extraordinary resilience. Thank you to everyone who has kept the flame burning. This report is for you, and for the students you have yet to teach.

Hon Tim Watts MP
Chair



1. Introduction

Asia capability matters for Australia

- 1.1 Australia's national interests, security, and prosperity are intrinsically linked to the Asian region.¹ For Australia to successfully engage with the region and pursue its national interests it needs a sovereign Asia capability. Building and sustaining this capability starts with the education system.
- 1.2 Asia's significance is growing not only for Australia but also for global economic and political affairs. By 2030 it is predicted that Asia will account for 53 per cent of the global population and contribute to nearly half of global gross domestic product. By 2040 the Southeast Asian region is projected to become the world's fourth largest economy.²
- 1.3 Australia's engagement with the countries of Asia and the Asian region is broad ranging. Four of Australia's top five trading partners are in Asia - China, Japan, South Korea, and India – and taken collectively, Southeast Asia is Australia's second largest trading partner, larger than bilateral trade with Japan and the United States.³
- 1.4 More than ever before, Australia's security is also determined by Asia. Geostrategic competition is intensifying. The rules-based order in the region is under pressure. All countries in Asia are being forced to act to preserve their sovereignty and agency in a more complex and contested geostrategic environment.⁴
- 1.5 Understanding Asia and building Asia capability goes beyond Australia's external relationships. Australia has a diverse multicultural community and at the 2021 census, 17 per cent of Australians identified as having Asian heritage. In learning about Asia and developing Asia capability, Australians will better understand modern Australia as a nation and its place within the region.⁵
- 1.6 Schools and universities play a central role in shaping values and attitudes and equipping the next generation of Australians with the knowledge and skills to understand and engage with Asia.⁶

¹ Asialink, *Submission 129*, p. 1; La Trobe Asia, *Submission 127*, p. 1.

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Submission 145*, p. 1; Australian Industry Group, *Submission 89*, p. 3.

³ DFAT, *Submission 145*, p. 1.

⁴ Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, p. 3; Mr Philipp Ivanov, *Submission 5*, pp. 1–2.

⁵ Per Capita, *Submission 98*, p. 1; South Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

⁶ Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 8; RMIT University, *Submission 167*, p. 1; Australian Primary Principals Association, *Submission 12*, p. 1.

- 1.7 Despite the longstanding recognition of the importance of building Asia capability through the education system, Australia's Asia capability is at a crisis point.⁷
- 1.8 Fewer and fewer students are learning a second language and the numbers of students engaging with Asian studies and Asian languages has fallen to the lowest levels since 1965.
- 1.9 In 2023, only 3.3 per cent of Year 12 students studied one of the three previously designated priority Asian languages (Japanese, Chinese, and Indonesian), a decrease from 5.1 per cent in 2010.
- 1.10 According to the 2018 Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, Australia ranked second last out of 64 countries for the number of year 10 students learning a second language. Australia is also well below the OECD average for speaking two or more foreign languages (38 per cent compared to 68 per cent).⁸
- 1.11 The declining enrolments in secondary school is matched by decreasing demand for Asian language and area studies at universities. University programs are closing and the pipeline of future learners, teachers, and researchers is thinning.⁹ At the same time, universities are financially disincentivised from running language programs.¹⁰
- 1.12 Australia is losing the institutional capability to train the next generation of Asia experts. This risks the perilous situation in which Australia is unable to produce high quality, Asia capable graduates at the moment they are needed most for the nation's security and prosperity.¹¹
- 1.13 A key issue affecting Australia's declining Asia capability is the lack of coordinated national action. As the Commonwealth Government has the biggest security and economic interest in building Australia's Asia capabilities, it must provide the strategic leadership necessary for the nation to do so.
- 1.14 While building Asia capability is an identified priority of the Australian Government, the Department of Education does not collect data or measure progress on how Australian schools and universities develop Asia capability amongst their students.¹²

⁷ Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), *Submission 67*, pp. 2-3; Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW), *Submission 117*, p. 1; Australian National University College of Asia and the Pacific, (ANU CAP), *Submission 32*, p. 2; University of Sydney, *Submission 171*, pp. 2-3; University of Tasmania, *Submission 42*, p. 1.

⁸ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 2; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 10*, p. 14; Business Council of Australia, *Submission 165*, p. 1; Ms Shane Samuelson, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Policy, Teaching and Learning Division, Department of Education (DoE), *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 3.

⁹ Professor Lousie Edwards, Fellow, Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH), *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 1; Dr Kayoko Hashimoto, *Submission 26*, p.2; Professor Kate Darian-Smith, President, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA), *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 2.

¹⁰ Universities Australia, *Submission 71*, p. 3; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 10.

¹¹ Professor Anne-Marie Morgan, Vice President, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teacher Associations (AFMLTA), *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 30; ASAA, *Submission 67*, p. 2-3.

¹² See Chapter two for a discussion on the data held at the federal level of government.

- 1.15 Another key issue affecting the current teaching of Asian languages and cultures is the fragmentation across the education system and a lack of coordination between the skills and knowledge that schools and universities impart and how this is connected to the needs of Australia.
- 1.16 Developing Asia capability is a complex systems problem. The decisions of multiple actors shape the choices available to other actors. The choices of students, parents, teachers, principals, lecturers, university administrators, employers and governments all affect the pathways available for Australians to build their Asia capability.
- 1.17 Complicating matters further, different supply and demand dynamics shape the choices of actors within different languages and areas of study. The number of diaspora students wanting to study a heritage language, the prominence of cultural products of particular languages, perceptions of economic prospects associated with particular languages and the complexity of different languages all vary significantly between language groups resulting in very different supply and demand dynamics.
- 1.18 The fragmentation of Australia's education system has resulted in disconnected pathways between schools, universities and the employment market. The Asia capability that modern Australia requires is not being provided by the education system, in large part because of this lack of coordination.
- 1.19 A coordinated whole of nation approach is required to rebuild and sustain Australia's Asia capability and equip the next generation of Australians with skills and knowledge to navigate geopolitical challenges, seize economic opportunities, and cultivate long-term relationships in the region.

What is Asia capability?

- 1.20 For the purposes of this report Asia capability refers to the cultural understanding and knowledge, language skills, and professional networks which enable effective engagement with the region.¹³
- 1.21 In broad terms, there are two dimensions of Asia capability needed in Australia:
- Generalist Asia literacy including an understanding of the relevance and importance of Asia to Australia and basic knowledge of the history, cultures, economies and politics of the region.
 - Deeper expertise including mastery of Asian language, specialised expertise of the history, cultures, economies and politics of Asian countries and in region experience and networks that can inform expert judgements on issues in the region.¹⁴

¹³ DFAT, *Submission 145*, p. 1.

¹⁴ Mr Gary Cowan, Chief Executive Officer, National Foundation for Australia-China Relations, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, pp. 2-3; AAH, *Submission 64.4*, pp. 6-7; Australia China Business Council, *Supplementary Submission 74.1*, p. 3; Australia-India Innovation Corridor, *Supplementary Submission 81.1*, p. 4.

- 1.22 While ideally, most Australians in the education system should be exposed to generalist Asia literacy, only a smaller cadre of experts need to follow the educational pathways necessary to develop deeper Asia capabilities.

Why does Australia need a sovereign Asia capability?

- 1.23 A sovereign capability is a capability that a nation is able to exercise in its own right, without reliance on other partners.
- 1.24 Australia faces its most challenging strategic environment since the Second World War. Just as Asia matters more to Australia's prosperity and security than ever before, so too is the region more complex and contested than ever before. Australia needs a sovereign Asia capability to understand and shape events in the region consistent with our own interests and priorities.
- 1.25 Australia's sovereign Asia capability exists in a specific national context. Australia's interests in Asia are unique, and Australia cannot rely on other countries to share its priorities or perspectives in the region. Australia's capacity to express its policy perspectives on the issues affecting itself and the region requires sovereign Asia capabilities.¹⁵
- 1.26 Australia's diplomatic service is one of the smallest in the OECD relative to the size of its economy and the breadth of its interests, and the community of think tanks and research institutes with genuine depth on Asia is small.
- It is smaller still once it is broken down by country and by discipline. Australia's best Asia analysts are world-class, but there are not many of them, and the institutions that employ them rarely have the scale to generate deep regional expertise from within.¹⁶
- 1.27 The centres of Asia expertise within government and think tanks rely on both a pipeline of new Asia capable talent being developed in the Australian education system and an Australian higher education sector that is able to do deep research and generation new knowledge about the region.
- 1.28 This means that Australia's educational institutions play a particularly significant role in buttressing Australia's sovereign Asia capability.

¹⁵ CIW, *Submission 117*, pp. 1–2; AAH, *Australia's China Knowledge Capability*, 2022, p. iv.

¹⁶ Lowy Institute, *Submission 174*, pp. 1 and 4; Mr Philipp Ivanov, *Exhibit 1*, p. 7.

The role of the Commonwealth Government and the Australian Curriculum

- 1.29 Under the Constitution, the Commonwealth Parliament does not have the power to legislate for primary and secondary education. While the state and territory governments and non-government education authorities are responsible for the administration and operation of schools within their jurisdiction, the Commonwealth Government plays a national leadership role in school education.¹⁷
- 1.30 At the Commonwealth level, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is responsible for developing the Australian Curriculum. This occurs through extensive consultation and with agreement by all Australian education ministers through the Education Ministers Meeting.¹⁸
- 1.31 A national curriculum was first agreed to in 2008 and was subsequently implemented in 2010. The current Australian Curriculum (Version 9.0) is for primary and secondary school students from Foundation to Year 10. It was approved on 1 April 2022 following the 2020-21 Australian Curriculum Review. Version 8.4 is the current iteration of the national curriculum for senior secondary subjects.¹⁹
- 1.32 The Australian Curriculum has a three-dimensional design, which comprises:
- Learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Science, the Arts, Technologies, Health and Physical Education, and Languages.
 - General capabilities: the knowledge, skills behaviours, and dispositions that students need to live and work successfully. There are seven general capabilities: Critical and Creative Thinking, Digital Literacy, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding, Literacy, Numeracy, and Personal and Social Capability.
 - Cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, and Sustainability.²⁰
- 1.33 The Australian Curriculum is designed to be used flexibly by schools and respond to the needs of local communities and classrooms. State and territory governments and non-government education authorities determine how it is implemented within their jurisdictions.²¹

¹⁷ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *About us*, 2025, <https://www.acara.edu.au/about-us> (accessed 28 January 2026).

¹⁹ ACARA, *Curriculum*, 2025, <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum> (accessed 28 January 2026).

²⁰ ACARA, *The three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum*, 2026, <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/help/f-10-curriculum-overview/the-three-dimensions-of-the-australian-curriculum#accordion-4fd4349713-item-b944d142c6> (accessed 6 March 2026).

²¹ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 5; Mr Stephen Gniel, Chief Executive Officer, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2026, p. 3.

Asia capability within the Australian Curriculum

- 1.34 The study of Asia and Asian languages has been included as a priority subject within the Australian Curriculum since its inception. The 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*—a precursor to the Australian Curriculum—emphasised that Australians need to become ‘Asia literate’ and engage and build strong relationships with Asia.²²
- 1.35 Each dimension of the current Australian Curriculum provides students with the opportunity to develop Asia capabilities.

Learning areas - Languages

- 1.36 The Australian Curriculum includes six Asian languages: Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. The Chinese Language curriculum offers three pathways (First Language, Background Language, and Second Language) to support differentiated learning and to allow teachers to select the most appropriate sequence based on students’ language proficiencies and cultural backgrounds.²³

General capabilities

- 1.37 General capabilities are addressed through the content of the learning area in the curriculum. The general capability of Intercultural Understanding supports students to learn how to live and work successfully in culturally diverse settings and involves students developing the ability to:
- Reflect on culture and cultural diversity,
 - Engage with cultural and linguistic diversity, and
 - Navigate intercultural interactions with empathy and respect.²⁴
- 1.38 It complements the cross-curriculum priority Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia and supports students to ‘develop the skills, values, and dispositions needed to engage respectfully and effectively with the diverse cultures of Asia, and to understand Australia’s place in the region’.²⁵

Cross-curriculum priority – Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia

- 1.39 The cross-curriculum priority ‘Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia’ explores Asian cultures, religions, histories, and languages. It is designed with three organising ideas:

²² Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, pp. 4, 9, and 14.

²³ ACARA, *Submission 52*, p. 3.

²⁴ ACARA, *General capabilities*, 2026, <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities> (accessed 17 February 2026); DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 3.

²⁵ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 3.

Knowing Asia and its diversity: This emphasises the need to appreciate the backgrounds, experiences, stories, religions, beliefs and perspectives within and among the nations of the Asia region. It is supported by understanding Asia and Australia's interconnected environments, natural, managed and constructed, and the political, financial and technological systems that drive relationships.

Understanding Asia's global significance: This examines the ways in which different significant nations in Asia have effected change. People are central to global developments, with human endeavour expressed through aesthetic, creative, political, economic and scientific pursuits. Highlighting key individuals, events, developments or nations reinforces how they have contributed to Asia's global significance.

Growing Asia–Australia engagement: This includes the relationship-building contribution of Australians with Asian heritage and explores how active connections between students and Asia's diverse communities can be deepened. Interaction builds empathy, respects cultural and linguistic differences, and leads to collaborative opportunities and outcomes. These active connections provide the lived experiences of global citizenship for young Australians, including through popular culture, and nurture relationships that reflect the historical and contemporary interdependency of Australia and the nations of Asia.²⁶

- 1.40 The cross-curriculum priorities are embedded throughout the various stages and subjects of the Australian Curriculum. For example, for Foundation to Year 6, in Humanities and Social Sciences, students explore the diversity within and across the countries of Asia. For Years 7-10 this learning is embedded across the subjects of Civics and Citizenship, Economics and Business, Geography, and History.²⁷
- 1.41 In the senior secondary years, there is a higher degree of student choice in subject selection. The cross-curriculum priorities are embedded throughout the subject curricula where relevant and appropriate. For example, Ancient History includes the 'study of India and China in the ancient period through the study of physical remains, the nature of those sources, and the beliefs and practices of Chinese society'.²⁸

²⁶ ACARA, *Submission 52*, p. 2.

²⁷ ACARA, *Submission 52*, p. 2.

²⁸ ACARA, *Representation of Cross-curriculum priorities*, <https://v8.australiancurriculum.edu.au/senior-secondary-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/ancient-history/representation-of-cross-curriculum-priorities/> (accessed 17 February 2026).

Asia capabilities in the tertiary education system

- 1.42 Australia's tertiary education system includes 219 registered higher education providers, including 44 Australian universities (both public and private). Australia's universities are autonomous institutions and offer courses based on a range of factors, including student demand.²⁹
- 1.43 As of 2024, approximately 1.7 million people were enrolled across the higher education system. There is minimal data held by the government on the availability of course offerings specifically related to Asia. Statistics are available for certain elements of language studies. For other fields of study, subjects are classified according to a broad and narrow field, such as society and culture or management and culture.³⁰
- 1.44 In the 1970s, there were 13 universities offering undergraduate subjects on South Asia, which is three times more than today. At present only five universities offer semester length subjects on India or South Asia, and only the Australian National University has a program dedicated to South Asia.
- 1.45 Similarly, in 1997, 66 languages were offered at Australian universities. By 2007, this number had dropped to 29.³¹
- 1.46 A major theme which emerged during the inquiry regarding Asia capability within the tertiary education system was the dramatic shift in the teaching and research of Asia and Asian languages at the university level. Student enrolments in Asian languages are declining, programs are at risk of closure, and there has been a reduction in post-graduate and higher degree research specialisation.³²

²⁹ Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *National Register*, <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register> (accessed 26 March 2026); Dr Jessica Hartmann, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Assurance Branch, DoE, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 9.

³⁰ DoE, *2024 Student summary tables*, <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2024-student-summary-tables> (accessed 26 March 2026); Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Introduction: Australian Standard Classification of Education*, 22 August 2001, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-standard-classification-education-ascod/2001/overview/introduction> (accessed 26 March 2026).

³¹ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 6; The University of Queensland (UQ), *Submission 138*, p. 2.

³² See for example: ANU CAP, *Submission 32*; UQ, *Submission 138*, pp. 2-3; Dr Gerhard Hoffstaedter, Professor Antje Missbach and Dr Jemma Purdey, *Submission 101*, p. 4; AAH, *Submission 64*.

1.47 As shown in Table 1.1 enrolments in Asian language studies by domestic higher education students are declining. For Southeast Asian Languages studies, the equivalent full-time student load (EFTSL) has decreased 75 per cent over the past 20 years (523 EFTSL in 2005 to 130 in 2024).³³ Subject enrolments in Eastern Asian languages peaked in 2016 with an EFTSL of 3,049 and decreased to 1,790 EFTSL by 2024.³⁴

Table 1.1 Higher Education Domestic Equivalent Full-Time Student Load: Language studies

Language group	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Northern European Languages	921	842	838	818	745	604	496	435	390	366
Southern European Languages	3,235	3,015	2,958	2,751	2,526	2,338	2,217	1,871	1,813	1,812
Eastern European Languages	85	88	93	85	81	68	52	48	43	45
Southwest Asian and North African Languages	193	194	209	195	196	162	176	141	129	134
Southern Asian Languages	39	34	26	23	19	16	17	13	12	11
Southeast Asian Languages	332	300	277	236	209	181	159	140	135	130
Eastern Asian Languages	3,013	3,049	3,007	2,944	2,754	2,435	2,414	2,057	1,868	1,790

Source: Department of Education, Submission 191.1, pp. 13-14

³³ DoE, *Submission 191.1*, p. 18. Note, the equivalent full-time student load is a measure of a full-time student's annual study load, DoE, *Equivalent full-time student load*, <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-publications/higher-education-administrative-information-providers-october-2021/8-equivalent-fulltime-student-load> (accessed 24 June 2026).

³⁴ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 10.

- 1.48 The nature of undergraduate language and coursework enrolments has also changed. In previous decades, there were greater numbers of university enrolments in intermediate and advanced language than in beginner level courses. The reverse trend is currently occurring.³⁵
- 1.49 In study areas such as international relations, economics, business, and media studies, there is more Asia content than in the past 25 years. However, this produces general knowledge of Asia within a field of expertise rather than producing Asia specialist scholars.³⁶ The pathways for academics to build careers in Australian institutions grounded in expertise in Asia have become increasingly limited.
- 1.50 These shifts are partly a consequence of the falling number of Year 11 and 12 students studying Asian languages: as demand from schools has declined, universities have reduced or closed some of their offerings.³⁷
- 1.51 It is not the only cause. Some students still take up an Asian language for the first time at university. But the shrinking secondary pipeline is a significant driver of the decline. This issue, and other factors affecting Asia capability in tertiary education, are discussed in detail in Chapter four.

Federal government policy levers

- 1.52 The federal government is the primary funder and regulator of the higher education system. Funding arrangements for teaching and learning occur through the *Higher Education Act 2003* and there are a range of other mechanisms for government funding for university research.³⁸
- 1.53 The Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) subsidises course fees for eligible higher education students. Subsidised places are known as a Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP). Higher education providers receive two payments for each CSP: a Commonwealth contribution provided through the CGS and another from the student. Students can defer course fee repayments through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme Higher Education Loan Program (HECS-HELP) and other fee-help arrangements.³⁹

³⁵ Dr Elly Kent, Deputy Director, Languages, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU CAP, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 19; Dr Zane Goebel, *Submission 11*, p. 3.

³⁶ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

³⁷ See, for example, Asia Institute, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 49*, p. 2; The School of Social Sciences, The University of Western Australia, *Submission 29*, p. 1.

³⁸ Dr Hazel Ferguson, Parliamentary Library, *A guide to Australian Government funding for higher education learning and teaching*, 23 April 2021, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/7921419/upload_binary/7921419.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22library/prspub/7921419%22 (accessed 15 April 2026).

³⁹ DoE, *Commonwealth Grant Scheme*, 16 March 2026, <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-funding/commonwealth-grant-scheme-cgs> (accessed 15 March 2026).

- 1.54 The federal government determines the Commonwealth contribution and student contribution amounts for each unit of study based on funding clusters. The Job-Ready Graduates Package (JRGP) introduced in 2021 altered the Commonwealth and student contributions. Under the JRGP, the Commonwealth increased its contribution for course fees for foreign languages and reduced the contributions required by students. For other fields, such as society and culture and the humanities, the Commonwealth contribution was decreased and student contributions increased.⁴⁰
- 1.55 Issues related to how this funding has impacted the development of Asia capability is discussed in Chapter four.
- 1.56 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has also invested in a range of initiatives to support Asia capability both directly and through its institutes and foundations, including the National Foundation for Australia China Relations, the Centre for Australia India Relations, the ASEAN-Australia Centre and the Australia-Indonesia Institute.

It also supports a range of youth dialogues with countries in the region, including the Australia-China Youth Dialogue, the Australia-India Youth Dialogue, the Conference of Australian and Indonesian Youth (CAUSINDY) and the Australia-Indonesia Youth Exchange Program.

Overseas and immersive experiences

- 1.57 The federal government also supports other arrangements for students in the tertiary education system to gain Asia capability through overseas study and immersive experiences.
- 1.58 DFAT's New Colombo Plan is a signature initiative which provides scholarships, semester and mobility programs to Australian undergraduates to undertake study, language training, and internships in the Indo-Pacific. It has annual appropriation of \$50.93 million.

Recent reforms of the NCP have prioritised longer term placements with language study components. NCP is now targeting 500 longer term scholarships per year by 2028 and is implementing a new learning language target of 25 per cent of participants undertaking language focused programs. Since its establishment in 2014, over 56,000 students have participated in NCP programs across 40 host locations. Nearly 90 per cent of NCP scholars have undertaken programs in Asia.⁴¹

⁴⁰ DoE, *Improving higher education for students*, 25 August 2025, <https://www.education.gov.au/job-ready/improving-higher-education-students> (accessed 15 April 2026); DoE, *Improving accountability and information for providers*, 18 July 2024, <https://www.education.gov.au/job-ready/improving-accountability-information-providers#toc-targeted-investments-in-national-priorities> (accessed 15 April 2026).

⁴¹ DFAT, *Submission 145*, p. 3.

- 1.59 University students enrolled in a Commonwealth Supported Place who study overseas may be eligible to use Overseas study expenses (OS-HELP) for expenses associated with overseas study. These loans support students to undertake Asian studies in eligible countries.⁴²

The Australian Tertiary Education Commission

- 1.60 The Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) was established in an interim capacity in 2025 and was legislated in 2026 to act as a steward of Australia's tertiary education system. ATEC has a range of responsibilities, including to enter into mission-based compacts with individual higher education providers and developing a statement of strategic priorities (SSP) for the tertiary education system every two years.
- 1.61 ATEC will manage mission-based compacts with higher education providers from 2027. Through mission-based compacts, higher education providers will demonstrate how they are responding to national level priorities as outlined in ATEC's SSP. The compacts are not designed to impose a uniform approach all providers, however, ATEC will have a role in ensuring collectively that there is sufficient coverage of national priorities across the system.⁴³
- 1.62 An exploration of the role of ATEC in developing Asia capability is included in Chapter four.

A history of previous inquiries and policy reform

- 1.63 Since the 1970s there have been a myriad of government, parliamentary, and non-government inquiries and reports into the study of languages and cultures. Some have focused on general foreign language acquisition, multicultural and migration policy, economic policy, and the language teaching profession, whereas others have examined specific aspects of Asian language learning and Asian cultural studies in educational settings.
- 1.64 These reports have led to a range of different policies across Australian governments. The key reports examining the study of Asian languages and cultures are listed below. This is not an exhaustive list of all reports on the subject or broader related subjects.
- Teaching of Asian Languages and Cultures in Australia: Report of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee 1971.
 - Asia in Australian Education: Report of the Committee on Asian Studies to the Asian Studies Association of Australia 1980.

⁴² DoE, *Submission 191*, pp. 11-12; For a full list of countries see: DoE, *OS-HELP*, 17 February 2025, <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-publications/higher-education-administrative-information-providers-october-2021/32-os-help#toc-32-10-asian-language-study-requirements> (accessed 19 February 2025).

⁴³ DoE, *Submission 191*, pp. 10-11.

- A National Strategy for the Study of Asia in Australia 1988.
 - Asia in Australian Higher Education: Report of the Inquiry Into the Teaching of Asian Studies and Languages in Higher Education 1989.
 - Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future: A Report Prepared for the Council of Australian Governments on a Proposed National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy for Australian School 1994 (the Rudd Report).
- 1.65 The earliest reports on this issue were produced in the years following the post-war period and at a time when Australia's migration and demographic patterns were experiencing significant changes. During this period there was also growing recognition of the need for Australia to develop an independent foreign policy and bilateral relationships with the countries of Asia.
- 1.66 The reports covered a range of different elements regarding the study of Asia and Asian languages in the education system and the importance of the education system in building the knowledge and skills of Australians to effectively engage in the region.
- 1.67 Some reports included comprehensive surveys of the state of Asian language and cultural education, the social and business attitudes of the study of Asia at the time, and the rationale and importance of the education system in teaching Asian languages and cultures.
- 1.68 The reports contained a slew of recommendations across various related policy areas including, funding for government programs to increase the uptake of Asian language and cultural studies, targets for student enrolments and fluency in Asian languages, and coordination between secondary and tertiary education and among and between the federal and state and territory governments.⁴⁴

Government white papers and policy directions on Asia capability

- 1.69 In addition to the above inquiries, there have been major government white papers and policy positions over the years that have explored the significance of Asia to Australia and the role of the education system in building Asia capability.
- 1.70 For example, the Commonwealth Government's 1988 *Higher Education White Paper* emphasised the link between Asian language skills and Australia's economic future and identified Asian studies as a priority area of the federal government for higher education intake.

⁴⁴ Report of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee, *Teaching of Asian Languages and Cultures in Australia*, 31 March 1971; Committee on Asian Studies, Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Asia in Australian Education*, August 1980; Asian Studies Council, *A National Strategy for the Study of Asia in Australia*, July 1988; Steering Committee, Asian Studies Council, *Asia in Australian Higher Education: Report of the Inquiry Into the Teaching of Asian Studies and Languages in Higher Education*, January 1989; Council of Australian Governments, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*, February 1994.

- 1.71 The 1989 *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy* report to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Garnaut report) explored the rise of the Northeast Asian region and Australia's ability to respond to shifting geopolitical conditions in the region and the role of the education system in building capability to respond to these changes.
- 1.72 The Garnaut report made a series of recommendations regarding the education system, including that all students should be exposed to the study of Asian history, geography, economics, politics and culture, and that Japanese, Chinese and Indonesia languages should have the highest priority (followed by Korean). It also recommended a target of five per cent of tertiary students studying an Asian language by 1995.⁴⁵
- 1.73 In 2006, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth endorsed the *National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools* (the National Statement).
- 1.74 The National Statement highlighted the importance of the education system in preparing students to live and work in a 'world in which the Asian region plays a major role'. It identified goals for Australian students in learning about Asia, including how students would understand Asia, develop informed attitudes and values, know about contemporary and traditional Asia, connect Australia and Asia, and communicate in diverse cultures.⁴⁶
- 1.75 The 2012 White Paper, *Australia in the Asian Century* recognised that 'Australia's education and training systems play a fundamental role in ensuring that all Australians have the right capabilities to take advantage of the Asian century'.⁴⁷ It identified Asia capability types, and which elements of the education system was best fit to deliver the specific capability and training.

It also set a range of targets for the education system, including that all students would have access to learning at least one priority Asian language, that being Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, or Japanese.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ross Garnaut, *Australia and the Northeast Asian Ascendancy*, October 1989, pp. 303–318.

⁴⁶ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *The National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools*, 2006, pp. 2, 8–9.

⁴⁷ Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, October 2012, p. 162.

⁴⁸ Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*, October 2012, p. 170.

- 1.76 The 2018 report, *An India Economic Strategy to 2035* (the Varghese report) explored Australia's economic partnership with India. The report identified low levels of India literacy within Australia as a constraint on that relationship. Its principal recommendation was directed at the education system (Recommendation 18) and called on Australian universities to partner with business to promote India literacy in Australia by expanding Indian studies, including Indian language studies, and establishing a small number of Chairs of Indian Studies. The report observed that six Australian universities taught an Indian language in 1996, but only two did so by 2018.⁴⁹
- 1.77 In 2019, the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Association (AFMLTA) was commissioned by the then Department of Education, Skills and Employment to develop a '*National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia*' (the National Plan). The AFMLTA undertook extensive research on state of languages education in Australia and produced three reports, published in 2024:
- Report 1: The State of Languages Education in Australia.
 - Report 2: Futures of Languages Education in Australia.
 - Report 3: Towards a National Plan and Strategy.
- 1.78 AFMLTA made four key recommendations to support the National Plan, including the implementation of high-quality language program, a new 'home languages plus one plus one' model of language learning, the establishment of a National Institute for Languages Education, and a Languages Education Working Group.⁵⁰
- 1.79 While the AFMLTA was not specifically tasked with focusing on Asian languages, it noted that the proposed national policy has component parts including Asian languages and capability, First Nationals Languages, Community and Heritage Languages, Classical Languages, and Additional Languages (all other languages including Auslan).⁵¹
- 1.80 At the time of writing, the AFMLTA reports were being considered by the Department of Education.⁵²
- 1.81 More recently in 2023, the report *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* (the Moore report) examined how Australia could accelerate its economic engagement with Southeast Asia.

The Moore report proposed a whole-of-nation effort to strengthen Southeast Asia capability and literacy across Australian business, government, the education and training system, and the wider community.⁵³

⁴⁹ DFAT, *An India Economic Strategy to 2035*, July 2018, pp. 90, 246, 314.

⁵⁰ AFMLTA, *Towards a National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia*, 2024, <https://nlps.afmlta.asn.au/afmlta-report-3-nlps-2024-v3-digital-2/> (accessed 15 April 2026).

⁵¹ AFMLTA, *Submission 104*, p. 2.

⁵² AFMLTA, *Supplementary submission 104.1*, p. 4.

⁵³ Commonwealth of Australia, *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, September 2023.

Previous policies and educational goals

- 1.82 There have been several significant policies related to languages and Asian studies across federal and state and territory governments.
- 1.83 At the federal level, Australia's first *National Policy on Languages* was developed in 1987 in response to a series of reports on languages and language education in Australia. The National Policy on Languages included principles for language learning in Australia and priorities and programs for learning the English language, Aboriginal languages, and community languages.
- 1.84 In 1992, the Australian Government released the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (ALLP) which set four national language and literacy goals:
- All Australians should develop and maintain effective literacy in English to enable them to participate in Australian society.
 - The learning of languages other than English must be substantially expanded and improved.
 - Those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages that are still transmitted should be maintained and developed, and those that are not should be recorded where appropriate.
 - Language services provided by interpreters and translators, the print and electronic media and libraries should be expanded and improved.⁵⁴
- 1.85 In the learning of languages other than English and the identification of language priorities, the ALLP recognised that there had been an increase in demand for the study of Asian languages and that 'Australia's location in the Asia-Pacific region and our patterns of overseas trade should continue to be a factor in this selection of priorities'.⁵⁵
- 1.86 Under the ALLP, the Commonwealth Government committed financial assistance to state and territory government and non-government education systems for Year 12 students who completed a priority language (Aboriginal languages, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Vietnamese).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, August 1991, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, August 1991, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, August 1991, p. 16–18.

- 1.87 The Rudd Report proposed a series of interventions targeting four priority Asian languages—Mandarin, Japanese, Indonesian and Korean— and set ambitious targets for Asian language acquisition in Australian schools. The Rudd Report recommended that 60 per cent of Year 10 students be studying a priority Asian language and 15 per cent of Year 12 students.⁵⁷
- 1.88 These recommendations led to the federally funded *National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Strategy* (NALSAS) which ran from 1994 to 2002. NALSAS set a target to increase the number of Year 12 students studying a priority Asian language to 15 per cent by 2006 and provided \$30 million per annum to state and territories to teach Asian languages in schools.
- 1.89 NALSAS' successor program, the *National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program* (NALSSP) ran from 2008 to 2012. Its goal was to have at least 12 per cent of Year 12 students achieve fluency in a priority Asian language by 2020. NALSSP had funding of approximately \$77 million per year to support the teaching of Asian languages.⁵⁸
- 1.90 In the tertiary education system, from around 2007 through to 2020, funding agreements between the Commonwealth Government and universities under the CGS had provisions for 'Nationally Strategic Languages' which referred to language courses in Arabic, Indonesian, Chinese (Mandarin), Hindi, Japanese, Korean and any other language notified in writing by the Commonwealth. These provisions required higher education providers to obtain the Commonwealth's approval prior to closing courses in a Nationally Strategic Language.⁵⁹
- 1.91 There was also funding for the Prime Minister's Australia Asia Endeavour Award which supported undergraduate and postgraduate students to undertake international research, study and internships in selected Asian countries.⁶⁰

Current policies to develop Asia capability in the education system

- 1.92 The Australian Curriculum and the cross-curriculum priority of 'Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia' is the primary mechanism for the primary and secondary school system to build Asia capability.

⁵⁷ Council of Australian Governments, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future: A Report Prepared for the Council of Australian Governments on a Proposed National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy for Australian School 1994*, pp. v and ix–x.

⁵⁸ Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ ASSA, *Submission 72.2*, p. 1; Australian Government, *Commonwealth Grant Scheme Funding Agreement Swinburne University of Technology*, p. 12; DoE, *Submission 191.2*, pp. 8–9.

⁶⁰ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 9; Hon Kevin Rudd, Former Prime Minister, 'Prime Minister's Australia Asia Endeavour Award for outstanding students', *Media Release*, 25 November 2009.

- 1.93 In addition to the Australian Curriculum and the policies in the tertiary education sector, such as scholarships for overseas immersive experiences, referred to earlier in this chapter, there are two other key government policies supporting the development of language capabilities:
- Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA): ELLA is a free digital language program, delivered by Education Services Australia, and is aimed at engaging young children in language learning in preschool and the early years of school. The program aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum and offers 13 languages. Chinese (Mandarin) is the most popular language among preschools and Japanese is the most popular choice for Foundation to Year 2 students.⁶¹
 - Community Language Schools Grant (CLSG) program: In 2025, the Government announced funding for the new CLSG. \$25.6 million has been committed over four years for the CLSG. This funding includes Stream One which will provide \$15.5 million to community language schools to support the operational costs of program delivery, professional development and teacher training, or to develop new online teaching material. Stream Two will provide \$5 million to support more students to become fluent in Asian languages in Years 11 and 12.⁶²
- 1.94 There is no overarching policy mechanism connecting the development of Asia capabilities across the different levels of the Australian education system.
- 1.95 Asia capability has not been detailed in communiqués following the Education Ministers Meeting nor has it been on the agenda of a National Cabinet Meeting.⁶³

Why have policy efforts fallen short?

- 1.96 Building Asia capability through the education system has been recognised as vital to Australia's economic and security interests for over four decades and series of policy interventions and programs have been implemented to build an Asia capable nation. However, these attempts have not delivered sustained progress.⁶⁴
- 1.97 While learning about and understanding Asia is a key element of the Australian Curriculum, in practice whether a student develops and engages deeply with Asia through their time in the education and into their careers has been attributed to sheer luck of exposure to particularly interested teachers and personal initiative.
- 1.98 The initiatives which bolstered Asian language and area studies within the education systems in decades past benefitted from strong national leadership across all levels of government and a commitment to teaching Australians about Asian.

⁶¹ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 9.

⁶² Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 109*, p. 5.

⁶³ DoE *Submission 191.1*, p. 34.

⁶⁴ Mr Philipp Ivanov, *Submission 5*, p. 1–2.

- 1.99 This policy focus is now largely absent from the education system. While learning about Asia is identified as a priority in the curriculum, in practice it is no longer treated as a priority learning area that brings benefits for the future of Australia.
- 1.100 Other issues identified for the gaps in Australia's education on Asia through the inquiry which will be discussed in the report include:
- Limited learning pathways within and between primary, secondary, and tertiary education.
 - Negative social attitudes and pressures influencing student choice.
 - Workforce shortages and challenges in developing Asia capable teachers.
 - Limited visibility of career outcomes from studying Asian languages and cultures.
 - Role of diaspora communities and inconsistent approaches and recognition between informal and formal education systems.
 - Lack of national data on Asia capability across Australia.

Referral and conduct of the inquiry

- 1.101 On 22 September 2025, the House Standing Committee on Education (the Committee) adopted the inquiry into building Asia capability in Australia through the education system and beyond following a referral from the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP.
- 1.102 The Committee was asked to consider how Australia can build Asia capability across the life course, from early learning through to tertiary education and into the workforce and identify system-level reforms and structural enablers that may support the development of Australia's Asia capability. The Terms of Reference can be found in the preliminaries section of this report.
- 1.103 The Committee announced its inquiry in a media release on 22 September 2025 and called for written submissions by 7 November 2025. The Committee received 195 submissions (Appendix A) and four exhibits (Appendix B) and held 11 public hearings (Appendix C).

Report outline

- 1.104 This report consists of six chapters, including this introduction
- Chapter two explores the need for a coordinated national effort to build Asia capability in Australia through the education system and beyond and how the current system has led to a crisis point in Australia's Asia capabilities.

- Chapter three provides an overview of how developing Asia capability is embedded in the primary and secondary school system. It covers the barriers to delivering Asia focused learning in schools and across jurisdictions, factors influencing student choice, and the workforce challenges affecting the teaching of Asian languages and its cultures.
- Chapter four discusses the impacts of the diminishing pipeline of secondary school students focusing on Asia and their transition to tertiary education. It outlines the shifts in the university sector in the study of Asia and its languages, the reduction of academic specialisation in Asia, and good practice models and methods to improve the current conditions.
- Chapter five explores educational opportunities outside the formal education system and the role of community language programs. It considers the role of diaspora communities in Australia's Asia capabilities, the connections between informal and formal education, and the availability and accreditation of community language study in the formal education sector.
- Chapter six examines the role of the federal government and private sector in signalling the employment opportunities for Asia capable graduates and outlines the need for the federal government to act as a model employer and provide continuous support to businesses in developing Asia capable staff.

Acknowledgements

- 1.105 The Committee extends its gratitude to all who provided written submissions, attended public hearings, and expresses its appreciation for the expertise and enthusiasm displayed throughout the inquiry.



2. A national approach is needed

- 2.1 The lack of national level policy leadership and coordination was a major theme across each dimension of the inquiry. Beyond the inclusion of Asia within the Australian Curriculum there is no national level coordination or policy focus on building Asia capability between and across the education system and into the workforce.
- 2.2 This chapter explores the impacts of the lack of national level leadership and coordination in building Asia capabilities through the education system and highlights the risks for particular areas of Asian language study in Australia.

A systemic lack of coordination

- 2.3 The Australian Curriculum is an important step and provides rightful recognition of the importance of studying Asia, however, the current system is a web of decision making. Micro-level decisions at individual schools cannot be relied upon to deliver national level strategic outcomes.
- 2.4 The Australian Council of State School Organisations highlighted the expectations and benefits of a coordinated system:

Building Asia capability cannot rest solely with schools. It requires collaboration across portfolios, Education, Foreign Affairs, Employment, and Trade, to create consistent messaging, programs, and incentives. Families want to see policy coherence: schools preparing children for university pathways that are sustained by tertiary provision, and tertiary provision linked to workforce strategies and industry demand.¹
- 2.5 In discussing reasons for the lack of progress in Australia's Asia capabilities and the role of national messaging, Professor Hugh White told the Committee that:

.... I think we have some very deep attitudinal questions here. I think Hawke's invocation of Curtin's turn to America in 1941 is apt here, because it does, I do think, take national leadership, with a capital N and L, to help to change these attitudes. It was, I would say, poor national leadership at successive points—the points I've mentioned—which encouraged people to think that somehow Asia wasn't that important to us.²

¹ Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), *Submission 10*, p. 13.

² Professor Hugh White, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 49.

- 2.6 Beyond the education system, inquiry participants emphasised that there is no home portfolio for building Asia capability. Many government agencies have a role in general engagement with Asia, but no singular agency leads on the matter.³
- 2.7 For example, the National Health and Medical Research Council has global health as a priority area with a particular focus on partners in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, the Department of Industry, Science and Resources has responsibility for Australia's industry and innovation, and there are a range of dispersed grant programs across the government which offer opportunities to engage with Asia.⁴
- 2.8 The Queensland University of Technology succinctly described the problem:
- ...when something is everybody's job, it is nobody's job. The single biggest challenge in addressing this is that nobody owns the problem; the second biggest problem is that when someone occasionally puts their hand up, everyone else sighs with relief and backs away.⁵
- 2.9 The programs that do exist to support the development of Asia capability in Australia are disconnected from one another, often relying on chance for a student to come across an opportunity. As Mr Philipp Ivanov describes:
- Investments in programs such as the New Colombo Plan, Asialink Education, and the Centre for China in the World were significant and impactful, but disconnected from a coherent national plan to lift our Asia capabilities of our young people, professionals and community at large.⁶
- 2.10 There was a consistent message throughout the inquiry that lack of connection between systems and programs is a risk to Australia's Asia capability. Box 2.1 presents a case study one student's experience navigating a disconnected system.

Box 2.1 Case study – A student's journey

Australia is at risk of losing critical Asia capability at the very moment the Indo Pacific region is shaping our economic, diplomatic and security future. My experience — born in Bali, raised in Darwin, educated in both countries, and now working professionally between Australia and Indonesia — demonstrates what is possible when Asia literacy is supported, and what we stand to lose as opportunities erode.

...

³ Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, p. 6; Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH), *Submission 64*, p. 5; Australia Indonesia Institute, *Submission 103*, p. 7; Queensland University of Technology (QUT), *Submission 168*, pp. 3–4.

⁴ Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, p. 6; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 5; Australia Indonesia Institute, *Submission 103*, p. 7; QUT, *Submission 168*, pp. 3–4.

⁵ QUT, *Submission 168*, pp. 3–4.

⁶ Mr Philipp Ivanov, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

I benefited from a school system that valued Indonesian. A school exchange to Surabaya supported by the Australia-Indonesia BRIDGE School Partnerships Program profoundly shaped my life and strengthened my desire to build a career connected to Indonesia and through my studies, I was able to learn more about the country I am from. These opportunities and lessons depended on dedicated teachers with a passion for what they do.

...

At university, I was fortunate to study in Yogyakarta through a Memorandum of Understanding between the Law faculty at Charles Darwin University and International Law faculty at Gadjah Mada University. I then secured an internship in Jakarta through professional networks and goodwill of the firm I worked for who were members of the Lawyers Association Worldwide. These opportunities were transformative, but they highlight a deeper structural weakness: they were not products of a consistent national system, but of luck and personal initiative.

Most Australian students/professionals cannot rely on chance access to a suitable MOU or professional connections (the firm I worked for was the only firm in the whole of the Northern Territory with membership in Lawyers Association Worldwide). The reality is that opportunities to study in Asia at undergraduate level remain limited and unevenly distributed across the country. Students from outside major cities also face a lack of awareness, institutional support and visibility around Asian study options, and there are few clear or consistent pathways into Asia-focused careers beyond government. In effect, the system assumes motivated students will find their own way, rather than guaranteeing structured access to Asia-capability development for all Australians

...

My life has been shaped by Australia's engagement with Asia. The opportunities that allowed me to form deep linguistic and cultural connections must not be left to chance. Australia's strategic and economic future will be determined in the Indo Pacific. Our education system must reflect that reality by nurturing the skills, confidence and cultural literacy needed for meaningful engagement.

We must treat Asia capability not as a cultural luxury, but as a pillar of national resilience and opportunity.⁷

- 2.11 The federal government is in a unique position to lead on developing a sovereign Asia capability. It can unite initiatives across a breadth of portfolios and coordinate with state and territory governments to align the education system with the nation's highest level strategic interests and respond to changing shifts in the Asian region.⁸

⁷ Mr Max Stretton, *Submission 40*.

⁸ Charles Darwin University, *Submission 38*, pp. 6–7; Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, p. 6.

- 2.12 The Committee put the question of whether the rates of Australians studying Asian languages was a priority to the Department of Education (DoE) in this Inquiry. Asked whether it was concerned about the decline in Asian languages specifically, which replied:

Asian languages specifically—we're somewhat agnostic at this moment in terms of languages, but, given our position in the Asian region, obviously the Asian languages have always had a high focus in the education sphere.⁹

- 2.13 There are disconnections between and within the education system and private and public sector employment opportunities. Many inquiry participants called for some form of national strategy or framework on Asia capability.¹⁰
- 2.14 In the proposals for a national strategy, the education system was a central focus. However, submitters and witnesses described the importance of connecting the various elements of such a strategy to broader goals of the workforce and national level capability demands.
- 2.15 A national strategy would provide the signal needed for the education system to prioritise the development of Asia capability and would be a central mechanism of coordination across the various jurisdictions and sectors.¹¹

We don't know what we don't measure

- 2.16 A persistent issue throughout the inquiry was the lack of national level data on Asia capability within Australia's education system and workforce.
- 2.17 At the national level, data is only collected and reported on for the enrolments in languages at the Year 12 level. There is no nationally held data for lower secondary years or primary school.¹²

⁹ Ms Shane Samuelson, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Policy, Teaching and Learning Division, Department of Education (DoE), *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 2.

¹⁰ See, for example, Philipp Ivanov, *Submission 5*, p. 3; Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 5; Charles Darwin University, *Submission 38*, p. 5; Mr Ravi Krishnamurthy, *Submission 6*, p. 5; Dr Jennifer Star OAM, *Submission 13*, p. 1; Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, pp. 5–6; Australian Professional Teachers Association, *Submission 58*, p. 4; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 6; Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), *Submission 67*, p. 6; Ms Danielle Rajendram, Director, Advisory and Insights, Asialink Business, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 3.

¹¹ See, for example, Mr Ravi Krishnamurthy, *Submission 6*, p. 3; Charles Darwin University, *Submission 38*, p. 6; Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, p. 6; Professor Melissa Crouch, *Submission 60*, p. 3; Ms Rajendram, Asialink Business, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 3.

¹² Ms Samuelson, DoE, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 1; DoE, *Submission 191.1*, p. 15.

- 2.18 State and territory governments are responsible for the collection of various data points for primary and secondary school. The level and approach to the collection and publication of this varies by jurisdiction. For example, Queensland publishes datasets on the languages offered in state schools each semester but not student uptake whereas New South Wales publishes enrolment tables on the number of students in specific languages.¹³
- 2.19 In discussing the trends of Asian language learning and the data available at a national level, the DoE told the Committee ‘We don’t track the numbers of students participating. The data at the national level is not very good’.¹⁴
- 2.20 Further complicating the nature of the available data is that there is little if any longitudinal tracking of student pathways and assessment of how many students commence a language in primary school and continue that language all the way through to Year 12.¹⁵
- 2.21 Asialink Education highlighted the effects of the limited longitudinal data on Asian language learning:
- There has been no national data collection on Asian language learning in Australian schools Foundation to Year 10 since the 2011 report *The Current State of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean Language Education in Australian Schools*. That’s 14 years of not actually knowing how many young Australians are learning an Asia language in schools.¹⁶
- 2.22 The lack of data continues through to tertiary education. At the tertiary level, there is minimal data held by the federal government on the availability of course offerings specifically related to Asia. Statistics are available for language enrolments at a regional level, but this data is not disaggregated into specific languages. For course offerings, subjects are classified according to a broad and narrow field of study such as society and culture or management and culture.¹⁷
- 2.23 Several non-government organisations and interested groups have conducted their own research to attempt to assess varying elements of Asia capability, including course offerings and enrolments in Asia related study in tertiary institutions.¹⁸

¹³ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁴ Ms Samuelson, DoE, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 1.

¹⁵ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 17; Thomas Mansfield, *Submission 33*, p. 4; Independent Schools Australia (ISA), *Submission 175*, p. 8; Business Council for Sustainable Development Australia, *Submission 169*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 15.

¹⁷ DoE, *2024 Student summary tables*, <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2024-student-summary-tables> (accessed 26 March 2026); Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Introduction: Australian Standard Classification of Education*, 22 August 2001, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-standard-classification-education-ascod/2001/overview/introduction> (accessed 26 March 2026); Korean Studies Association of Australia, *Submission 154*, p. 6.

¹⁸ See for example: Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, *Submission 49*, p. 2; AAH, *Submission 64*; ASAA, *Submission 67*.

- 2.24 For example, the Australian Academy of the Humanities advised the Committee that the only data point on Chinese expertise in tertiary education collected at the federal level relates to Chinese medicine studies.¹⁹
- 2.25 Beyond the education system the Committee received some evidence about the nature of Asia capabilities in the workforce. No nationally collected data was presented to the Committee.
- 2.26 In the Australian Public Service (APS), there is no goal or target for developing Asia capability and the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) does not benchmark Asia capabilities within the APS.²⁰
- 2.27 Some APS agencies, such as the Department of Defence, collect data and track the portion of staff joining the department with Asian language skills through its staff census.²¹
- 2.28 In the private sector, the Committee heard that although the data is inadequate, there is evidence to suggest that Australian business leaders are facing capability gaps in navigating the complexities of the Asian region.²²
- 2.29 The lack of data is a major constraint in assessing Australia's Asia capabilities. Without adequate data, it is difficult to identify and address core issues and design effective solutions. Robust data is needed across all levels of the education system and into employment outcomes to help inform policy decisions and track progress.²³
- 2.30 Measuring Asia capability and skills such as intercultural understanding in the school system is a difficult task. Caution was issued about implementing traditional metrics and assessment methods for Asia capabilities within schools. These types of capabilities were described as highly individualised, and it is better to use non-traditional assessment approaches to show students' learning.²⁴
- 2.31 The skills required to become Asia capable extend beyond the early years of education and better data can assist in assessing strengths and weaknesses.
- 2.32 Asialink discussed how data is central to showing the value of Asia capabilities and the benefits of improving the current data:

¹⁹ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 5; Professor Louise Edwards, Fellow, AAH, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 4

²⁰ Australian Public Service Commission, *Submission 194.1*, p. 2.

²¹ Major General White, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, pp. 1–3.

²² Business Council of Australia, *Submission 165*, p. 2

²³ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 6; Professor David Hill, *Submission 53*, p. 1; Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, *Submission 72*, p. 72; Osmond Chu, *Submission 110*, pp. 1–2.

²⁴ Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 116.1*, p. 7.

There's the old adage 'what gets measured gets valued', so I would be strongly encouraging...how we can start to build a long-term dataset that not just actually measures completion in year 12 of Asian languages but actually comprehensively tracks all of the things that we think are important for making up Asia capability and how they then manifest in the Australian workforce and in Australian boardrooms into the future—if you like, an Asia capability version of the HILDA project or something along those lines.²⁵

- 2.33 Similarly, Asia Society Australia proposed a needs assessment of the specific capabilities required to advance Australia's prosperity and security in Asia. The proposed assessment includes a comprehensive survey of Australian businesses, government departments, universities, not for profit organisations, peak bodies, industry associations, bilateral chambers of commerce, think tanks, development organisations, and cultural institutions. It would identify specific Asia-relevant competencies that have helped organisations succeed in Asia in the past and new capabilities that are required for the future.²⁶
- 2.34 There is evidently a need for more comprehensive data collection and reporting to assess and track the progress in developing Australia's Asia capabilities and many inquiry participants called for improvements and expansions to the data that is collected and reported on at a national level.²⁷

Each language faces specific challenges

- 2.35 As outlined in Chapter one, there is a persistent decline in Asian language study from primary school right through to the tertiary education sector. However, the issues confronting the teaching of Asian languages in Australian schools differs from language to language.
- 2.36 The Committee received a breadth of evidence on the pressing and distinct issues facing the study of South Asian and Indian languages, Chinese (Mandarin), and Bahasa Indonesia.
- 2.37 There is growing demand for South Asian languages, particularly Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu which is being driven by one of the fastest-growing parts of Australia's population. While the demand is growing, there is limited connection between the needs and wants of the community with the language teaching offered by the formal education sector. There are very few opportunities to study these languages in Australian schools.

²⁵ Ms Rachel Thompson, Asialink, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 6.

²⁶ Asia Society Australia, *Submission 79*, pp. 1–2.

²⁷ See, for example, The School of Social Sciences, The University of Western Australia, *Submission 29*, pp. 4–5; Professor David Hill, *Submission 53*, pp. 1–2; Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU), *Submission 80*, p. 2; Dr Emily Hills and Mrs Janelle Horsington, *Submission 95*, pp. 2 and 5; Associate Professor Yu Tao, *Submission 99*, p. 2; Australian Technology Network of Universities, *Submission 107*, p. 6; ISA, *Submission 175*, pp. 5 and 8.

- 2.38 South Asian languages are being kept alive by the hard work of diaspora families and community language programs. However, students studying these languages in community language programs and other informal settings face significant barriers in receiving formal recognition for their language study.
- 2.39 Chinese is a very difficult language for native English speakers to learn and requires years of in-depth study. The Australian Curriculum provides for different streams of Chinese language learning and differentiates between background and non-background speakers.
- 2.40 However, aside from a small number of programs at bilingual schools, most school-based Chinese (Mandarin) language teaching is delivered through programs with very limited hours of classroom instruction. Compounding this, there is no coordination between schools to enable continuity of language learning from one level of schooling to the next.
- 2.41 As a result, students who attend bilingual Chinese primary schools are, as often as not, unable to attend secondary schools that teach the language. For those who are able to attend a secondary school that offers Chinese, the lack of learning coordination means that these students are generally forced to begin their learning again, from scratch, alongside beginner learners. Similarly, there is little effective coordination between the teaching of Chinese in community language settings and that in the formal schooling environment. The Australian education system makes it very difficult for Chinese learners to progressively develop their language skills over time.
- 2.42 The teaching of Bahasa Indonesia in Australian schools faces a different challenge. Plummeting student numbers and accelerating program closures have the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia in Australian schools headed for functional extinction in Australia. Year 12 enrolments in Indonesian have dropped from 1,160 in 2010 to just 542 in 2023.²⁸
- 2.43 In Queensland, Indonesian is already functionally extinct. Over the past 15 years, only two schools have consistently taught a Year 12 or combined Year 11 and 12 class in Indonesian: Ferny Grove State High School and the Cairns School of Distance Education. Four other schools teach Indonesian to middle school; students at those schools who want to continue past Year 10 must generally enrol through distance education.
- 2.44 In 2025, 19 students were enrolled in Year 12 Indonesian across the entire state. In 2026, that number was predicted to be four. Two of the six remaining schools have already advised that their senior programs will end in 2026, and Ferny Grove will have no Year 12 enrolments for the first time in more than 15 years.²⁹

²⁸ Dr Elly Kent, Deputy Director, Languages, School of Culture, History and Language, ANU CAP, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 19.

²⁹ Associate Professor Annie Pohlman, *Submission 37*, pp. 2 and 5.

- 2.45 Victoria is the strongest state for teaching Indonesian. However, even in Victoria, the number of schools which offered Year 12 Indonesian in 2024 was just 44, down from 116 in 2005.³⁰
- 2.46 The decline of Indonesian is particularly troubling given the importance of the Australia-Indonesia relationship.
- 2.47 The issues regarding the study of South Asian and Indian languages, Chinese and Bahasa Indonesia are discussed in Chapter three. Issues regarding the formalisation of community language education is discussed in Chapter five.

Committee comment

- 2.48 The Committee is conscious of the long history of inquiries and reports on Australian Asia capability and the persistent lack of progress they have produced. The ambition of building Australia's Asia capability has been undermined by waxing and waning political attention, a mismatch of Commonwealth and state and territory priorities, the coordination challenges inherent in a complex systems problem and long-time horizons before the benefits of policy interventions in a capability pipeline were realised.
- 2.49 The time has come for a different approach. The costs of inaction are no longer a matter for future parliaments. On the evidence before the Committee, without intervention Indonesian language teaching will be functionally extinct in Australian schools by 2031. The implications of this will not be felt in the distant future, they will be felt within the next term of Parliament. This issue has found itself on a burning platform.
- 2.50 In this context, this report takes a new approach to addressing the challenge of building Australia's Asia capability. In place of the universal-access approaches of past inquiries, where ambition has outstripped implementation, the recommendations of this report seek to secure a sustainable, minimum viable pipeline for Australia's Asia capability.
- 2.51 The recommendations designed to build this minimum viable pipeline are underpinned by a consistent set of underlying principles informed by past failures.
- 2.52 **Coordination of efforts:** A pipeline that crosses schools, universities, governments and employers needs a coordinating mechanism to enable progressive learning. Four decades of leaving the task to chance have produced steady decline. National coordination is needed for the education system to deliver the sovereign capability the nation needs.

³⁰ Ms India Lewis, *Submission 69*, p. 3.

- 2.53 **A complex systems problem requires systemic solutions:** No single measure rebuild is able to secure the pipeline on its own. Isolated interventions have failed before. Most recently, the Job-Ready Graduates package cut the cost of language subjects while ignoring incentives in the broader system. Enrolments kept falling. Each recommendation of this report buttresses the others to build a sustainable, mutually reinforcing system.
- 2.54 **Quality supply increases demand:** Students choose to study languages where they have the intrinsic motivation to do so. They will choose to study in classes that are well taught, that expose them to in-country and cultural experiences, that offer pathways for continuous study and are visibly valued by leaders. Lifting the quality and reliability of provision is what shifts student choice. The report backs depth of learning over breadth.
- 2.55 **Targeting the transitions:** The system loses students at predictable handovers between levels of education. The recommendations are targeted at those attrition points so that, instead of being deterred, students are actively pulled through these transition points. In-country experiences in early high-school, Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) Bonuses and options for credit study at university while at high school will keep students on the pathway to further language study.
- 2.56 **Designed to last:** Anchoring the delivery of these recommendations in existing institutions and instruments, and reporting to Parliament each year, is meant to let this effort survive the changes of leadership and political attention that have undermined previous reports.

Recommendation 1

- 2.57 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a 10-year National Asia Capability Strategy that recognises Asia capability as a vital sovereign capability. This strategy should be developed in consultation with the Department of Education, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Department of Defence, and state and territory governments.**

The strategy should designate a Commonwealth department with responsibility for building Australia's Asia capability and allow for the responsible Minister to make an annual statement to Parliament on Australia's Asia capability and progress on implementation of the strategy.

Recommendation 2

2.58 The Committee recommends that the National Asia Capability Strategy designate Asian languages in two groups for the purposes of Commonwealth policy and programs:

- **Priority Languages, comprising Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, Hindi and Japanese, attracting direct Commonwealth investment, including through Asia Leader Schools, Asian Language Hubs, nationally strategic language protections in Commonwealth Grant Scheme agreements, the ATAR bonus, and targeted teacher supply measures.**
- **Supported Languages, comprising initially Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and South Asian community languages including Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Bengali, supported through nationally coordinated curriculum development and accreditation, community language program alignment, recognition through the National Languages Digital Passport, and teacher accreditation pathways.**

The Strategy should publish the criteria for designation and review the designations every five years, including a pathway for supported languages to be designated as priority languages.

2.59 One aim of this inquiry was to examine the current state of Asia capability within the education system. This goal could not be fully realised due to a severe lack of data.

2.60 The data available on the state of Asia capability within the education system is limited to enrolments in Asian languages. The data on Asian languages is also limited and has gaps.

2.61 In the primary and secondary system, at the national level the data reported is only for Year 12 enrolments. Data for lower secondary and primary school years is not collected and reported nationally and there is no longitudinal assessment available on continuous language learning. For other capabilities there are no metrics within the education system to measure the extent of students' Asia capabilities.

2.62 At the tertiary level, the gaps in the data continue. Asian language enrolments are reported nationally but it is collated into regional and sub-regional languages rather than by a language. No national level data exists on university course offerings in Asian studies or the number of students focusing on Asia in honours or higher degree research programs.

2.63 The Committee recognises the difficulty in attempting to measure a concept such as Asia capability, but the difficulty should not inhibit better data collection and analysis.

2.64 The persistent lack of data across all levels of the education system severely limits the ability to assess Australia's current Asia capabilities, identify capability gaps, and plan for Australia's future capability needs. Improvements to data collection is needed and this data needs to be available at nationally centralised level to have a holistic picture of the entire system.

- 2.65 As the Committee sets out in Chapter six, diversity data is not capability data. Both are worth measuring, separately and side by side: a dashboard should track the Asia capability of Australia's leadership alongside the representation of Asian-Australians within it, so that progress on either cannot be mistaken for progress on both.

Recommendation 3

- 2.66 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government through the National Report on Schooling establish a National Data Framework and Dashboard on Asia capability to track participation levels and assess capabilities across the education system.**

The schools component should be developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority; data on higher education should be provided by the Department of Education and the Australian Tertiary Education Commission.

The National Data Framework and Dashboard should include data on the following:

- School level data on participation rates in Asian languages by year level, senior secondary completions, and continuity of language study between year levels.
- Enrolment and completion rates of Asian language study in higher education providers.
- The number of students undertaking and completing honours and higher degree research programs in Asian language and/or cultural studies.
- The number of higher education providers offering courses and degrees in Asian language and cultural studies.
- The level of in-country and immersive experiences undertaken by students in secondary and tertiary education.
- The representation of Asia capability in Australia's senior leadership, including Asian-Australian representation on ASX 200 boards and executive teams, in the Senior Executive Service of the Australian Public Service, and in university governance, drawing on existing data collections where available.



3. Asia capability in the primary and secondary school system

- 3.1 As outlined in Chapter one, the Australian Curriculum sets out ways in which primary and secondary students should learn about and engage with Asia and yet students are not being equipped with the language and cultural skills needed to be Asia capable.
- 3.2 This chapter discusses the key barriers and enablers within the primary and secondary school system to developing Asia capable young people. It covers the following issues:
- fragmentation across the education system
 - lack of continuity between education levels
 - factors influencing student participation and choice in Asian language programs
 - the vital role of immersive and in-country experiences, and
 - the challenges facing the teaching workforce and profession in delivering Asian languages and Asia based content.

Fragmentation and lack of coordination

- 3.3 A major theme arising from the inquiry was the fragmentation and inconsistent delivery of Asia focused content across Australian jurisdictions.¹ While the Australian Curriculum sets national level priorities for the education system, there is often a clash of priorities between federal and state and territory government and factors at the individual school level which influence decisions about how curriculum content is delivered.
- 3.4 The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) explained that there are many layers between the content of the Australian Curriculum and what is taught in the classroom:

¹ See, for example, Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), *Submission 10*, p. 3; Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA), *Submission 12*, p. 3; Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA), *Submission 58*, p. 2; Japanese Language Teachers' Association of South Australia (JLTASA), *Submission 70*, p. 2; Independent Schools Australia (ISA), *Submission 175*, p. 6.

There's decision-making all through those layers. Some of that resides at a system level. New South Wales choosing to put in place a syllabus document—that's in their legislation that all schools must teach, for example. In Queensland, they must teach the Australian curriculum as it is. In terms of the choice about languages, you're right that some of that is made at the school level. I would agree that there are all kinds of factors that have to go into that. Even within the classroom, of course, the teacher makes decisions about what parts of that are taught and where the priority is or those parts.²

- 3.5 One submitter highlighted the clash of priorities between the levels of government in relation to languages education:

Languages are included in the national curriculum, so schools across Australia are encouraged to run a language program, this is an enabler. State governments being responsible for education is a barrier. State governments do not have the same priorities as the federal government. The Queensland state government particularly does not seem to consider the negative impact from the loss of language programs in schools.³

- 3.6 Similarly, the Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) echoed these concerns and noted that new syllabus documents in New South Wales appear to give reduced prominence to Asia literacy compared to previous versions, raising concerns about its visibility as a priority.⁴

- 3.7 These factors can lead to limited learning opportunities for students. Lessons about Asia are often 'tokenistic' and lacking depth. A common class assignment for students is to research an Asian country and present their findings to the class. These types of projects are often produced without authentic resources or genuine connection to Asia.⁵

- 3.8 It was also reported that there is confusion about how to embed the cross-curriculum priorities across the key learning areas. These priorities are not mandated or assessed which often leads to the perception that they are optional.⁶

- 3.9 Classroom implementation of the cross-curriculum priority and a student's exposure to Asia is highly inconsistent.

² Mr Stephen Gniel, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2026, p. 3.

³ Name withheld, *Submission 17*, p. 2.

⁴ APTA, *Submission 58*, p. 1–2.

⁵ See, for example, ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 2; Dr Jennifer Star OAM, *Submission 13*, p. 8; Language Teachers Association of Tasmania (LTAT), *Submission 63*, p. 1–2.

⁶ Dr Rebecca Cairns and Associate Professor Michiko Weinmann, *Submission 162*, p. 4.

- 3.10 The multi-layered structure to education in Australia results in the inconsistent application of the Australian Curriculum and prioritisation of Asian focused content. While the Australian Curriculum suggests that Asia capability is a priority area within the education system, the reality is that education is a shared responsibility between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, and as a result ‘some schools provide robust Asia-focused learning whereas others offer little or none’.⁷
- 3.11 The lack of ownership and frameworks for measuring Asia capability outcomes was also discussed as a consequence of the fragmentation and lack of coordination within the education system. The current system of divided responsibilities has led to inconsistent efforts, missed opportunities, and has inhibited progress in building Asia capability at a national level.⁸
- 3.12 For example, Mr Richard McGregor, told the Committee:
- As per previous evidence given to this inquiry, I think the education department appears to remain institutionally disinterested in the issue of Asian literacy. Since this is an education issue, that appears to be a big problem.⁹
- 3.13 To ‘re-prioritise’ the importance of developing Asia capability within the education system the Committee heard that national-level signals are needed to influence the decisions made throughout the system. For example, the Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) told the Committee:
- ... From the national level, the national role really comes down to framing the narrative around the importance of Asia capability. Principals who are leading schools respond to what is valued and what they’re judged as doing a good job in. If, at the national level, it’s framed as being really important for schools to be doing this, to be supporting Asia capability within our schools and within our staff, I think principals will value that.¹⁰
- 3.14 Previous federal government initiatives—the National Asian Language Studies in Australian Schools Strategy (NALSAS) and the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP)—were highlighted to show how national-level policy signals, funding commitments, and a coordinated effort across governments can improve coordination across the system and improve progress in Asia capability.¹¹

⁷ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 3.

⁸ See, for example, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, *Submission 72*, p. 2; Asialink, *Submission 129*, p. 4; ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 16.

⁹ Mr Richard McGregor, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 17.

¹⁰ Mrs Cheryl Brennan, Vice President, APTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 6.

¹¹ See, for example, Indonesia Council, Monash Herb Feith Indonesia Engagement Centre, and Acicis, *Submission 1*, p. 5; ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 3; ISA, *Submission 175*, p. 6; Thomas Mansfield, *Submission 33*, p. 1.

- 3.15 NALSAS and NALSSP ran from 1994 to 2002 and from 2008 to 2012 respectively. These programs were successful insofar as there was an increase in the number of secondary students enrolling in Asian languages. NALSAS led to a 60 per cent increase in Asian language enrolments nationally from 324,000 students to 518,000 students.¹²
- 3.16 In the context of these programs, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) explained the importance of how national-level signals and funding has flow on effects for the education system and leads to improved rates of Asian language learning:
- First of all we had the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools, NALSAS, policy, which ran from about 1994 to 2000. That showed support for four key Asian languages: Mandarin, Japanese, Korean and Indonesian. That then was followed by the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program in 2012. Since then, there has really been no consistent support or funding ... But it's basically about long-term planning and consistency, because, when those two prior policies were in place, there was an uptake in the study of Asian languages, so we know that that works.¹³
- 3.17 Following the cessation of these programs, enrolments in Asian languages in Australian schools steadily declined. These programs did not result in a system, sustained increase in Asian language capabilities.¹⁴
- 3.18 The lack of national policy or strategy to coordinate efforts to build Asia capability was cited as a key reason for the fragmentation and inconsistent delivery of Asia focused learning within the education system and many inquiry participants called for the development of a national strategy or agreement on Asia capability. Proposals for a national strategy varied but the central theme was to establish a coordinating body at the federal level and provide sustained funding to the states and territories to implement Asia capability initiatives. Federal funding would be tied to agreed measures (such as Asian language offerings and in-country immersion experiences). Other suggestions included requiring an annual statement to Parliament on the state of Asia capability.¹⁵

¹² University of Queensland (UQ), *Submission 138*, p. 3.

¹³ Professor Kerry Mullan, Convenor, Languages, RMIT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 35.

¹⁴ See, for example, UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 3; Dr Rebecca Cairns and Associate Professor Michiko Weinmann, *Submission 162*, p. 2; University of Tasmania, *Submission 42*, p. 2; Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies (Acicis), *Submission 75*, p. 2.

¹⁵ See, for example: Philipp Ivanov, *Submission 5*, p. 3; Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, p. 6; APTA, *Submission 58*, p. 4; Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), *Submission 67*, p. 6; Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH), *Submission 64*, p. 6.

Lack of continuity and limited pathways

- 3.19 Fragmentation within the school system is particularly pronounced in the study of Asian languages. Learning a language takes time and continuous effort, but students experience a patchwork of approaches and interruptions in their efforts to learn an Asian language within and across levels of the education system.
- 3.20 The Australian Curriculum provides for the teaching of six Asian languages (Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese). The decisions about which language to teach (including offering languages not included in the Australian Curriculum) are made by individual schools based on factors such as teacher availability, community demographics, and parental demand.¹⁶
- 3.21 This lack of system wide coordination means that the language a student learns in primary school is frequently not the same language taught at the high school serving the same catchment area. This lack of coordination further forces all students to effectively start language learning from scratch at every level of the education system.
- 3.22 The lack of continuity of language study across school levels is a major impediment to a sequential development of language learning.¹⁷
- 3.23 This discontinuity not only affects language proficiency and linguistic development but also the student's motivation to commence language learning in the first place. It also impacts the ability for language programs to grow and be sustainable within schools.¹⁸
- 3.24 A secondary Indonesian teacher shared their experience with this primary–secondary pipeline:
- In my context, none of our feeder primary schools offer Indonesian and as a result, the number of enrolments of Year 7 students wanting to study Indonesian when they begin their first year of high school is much lower than our other language offered (French), which happens to be offered by some of our feeder schools.¹⁹

¹⁶ ACARA, *Submission 52*, p. 3; ACARA, *Submission 52.1*, p. 14; Ms Shane Samuelson, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Policy, Teaching and Learning Division, Department of Education (DoE), *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 2.

¹⁷ ACARA, *Submission 52.1*, p. 14.

¹⁸ See, for example, Mr Chad Birks, *Submission 9*, p. 3; ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 10; Associate Professor Annie Pohlman, *Submission 37*, p. 7; The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, *Submission 44*, p. 4; Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson, and Dr Elly Kent, *Submission 135*, p. 3; Ms Jaime Nakahara, *Submission 143*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Name withheld, *Submission 187*, p. 3.

- 3.25 The Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) also provided an example from a parent of the impacts of the lack of continuity in language programs:
- My son started Japanese in Year 5, but by Year 8 the program had disappeared. Families like mine don't want token lessons; we want continuity so our children actually become confident users of another language.²⁰
- 3.26 The Committee heard that students and parents want to have access to a continuous language pathway and to know that their investment in learning a language in the education system is worthwhile and that they will be successful.²¹
- 3.27 The Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) explained that students make decisions early to discontinue a language when it is not available in senior years:
- ... Once schools don't have that year 11 cohort, students say, 'I'm not even going to do it at year 9, because I can't even go to year 12 even though I want to and I would love to.' There are out-of-school opportunities that we know students can access online or out of school hours, but that's not always possible for students.²²
- 3.28 Research conducted by Dr Louisa Field also demonstrated that 'students are more likely to opt for a language subject when they know that languages are available to them at a later stage'.²³
- 3.29 This 'visibility' includes the career pathways that come with Asian language and area studies. The limited visibility of the value of studying Asia and its languages directly impacts both parent and student attitudes towards Asian language learning.²⁴
- 3.30 ACSSO said that parents and students often struggle to see clear links between language learning proficiency, outcomes in the education system, tertiary education, and employment.²⁵
- 3.31 The availability of language learning pathways affects student progression decisions from primary and secondary school through to university. In speaking about the importance of the connections for language learning primary to tertiary education, Dr Ian Woolford told the Committee:

²⁰ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 1.

²¹ See, for example: Pondok Bahasa, *Submission 73.1*, p. 9; Mr Chad Birks, *Submission 9*, p. 3; Ms Jaime Nakahara, *Submission 143*, p. 2.

²² Mrs Kylie Farmer, Treasurer, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 32.

²³ Dr Louisa Field, *Submission 66*, p. 3.

²⁴ See, for example, Business Council for Sustainable Development Australia, *Submission 169*, p. 2–3; Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), *Submission 10.1*, p. 2.

²⁵ ACSSO, *Submission 10.1*, p. 2.

From my perspective, when programs are reduced or unstable at the university level, that does send a signal all the way back through the system to schools, to teachers, to students that these pathways may not be viable in the long term, so that pipeline needs to run in both directions. It's not just about preparing students for university; it's also about universities providing stable, visible end points that make it worthwhile for students to begin that language-learning journey in the first place.²⁶

- 3.32 The pipeline for Asian language learning between all levels of the education system is currently broken and there is a self-reinforcing cycle of decline: low enrolments make programs unviable and lead to their closure, closures reduce the options available to students, fewer options further depress enrolments. Each turn of the cycle makes the next closure more likely and the challenge of rebuilding harder.

The difficulty of elective language learning

- 3.33 Another factor affecting the continuity of language learning is the nature of mandatory language classes. Across Australia, the level of mandatory language learning is varied. For example, in Victoria, language learning is mandatory from the first year of primary school through to Year 10, whereas in other states, such as New South Wales and Western Australia, there are mandatory minimum hours assigned to language learning. Broadly, language learning becomes an elective around Year 8 or Year 10.²⁷
- 3.34 Once language learning becomes optional, enrolments suffer a significant decline. In primary school there is approximately a 70 per cent participation rate in languages which declines to around 13 per cent in lower secondary school and again to 8.4 per cent in senior secondary school.²⁸
- 3.35 As language study becomes an elective, it begins to compete with other subjects, extracurricular activities and can be perceived as less important than other options.²⁹
- 3.36 When student enrolment numbers fall in languages, continuing these classes become difficult to justify to school leadership given timetabling, staffing, and equity constraints, and further threatens the existence of the language program entirely.³⁰

²⁶ Dr Ian Woolford, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 19.

²⁷ University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 7; ACARA, *Supplementary submission 52.1*, p. 4; Language Teachers' Association of the Northern Territory (LTANT), *Submission 130*, p. 1.

²⁸ Ms Samuelson, DoE, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 1.

²⁹ See, for example, Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 109*, p. 5; Dr Jennifer Hsu, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 5.

³⁰ Pondok Bahasa, *Submission 73.1*, p. 6.

3.37 Dr Michelle Kohler explained how these decisions are made in secondary schools:

Often school leaders make provisioning decisions with limited understanding of the nature of languages education and how to effectively operationalise programs in ways that ensure longevity. Intermittent exposure and uncertain pathways lead to low enrolments, and ‘unviable’ classes lead to program closures, which is the biggest obstacle to participation and retention in [Asian] language learning.³¹

3.38 There were competing views on the extent to which languages should be mandated in Australian schools. Some inquiry participants were in favour of strong mandates for Asian languages in schools whereas others were hesitant about implementing compulsory language learning and viewed cultural engagement and a passion for learning as better a mechanism to involve students and lead them to choose to study a language.³²

3.39 Mandating language learning can be an important policy lever, however, consideration needs to be given to the other factors that engage students and build intrinsic interest in learning about Asia.

Different challenges for different languages

3.40 As discussed in Chapter two, the Committee heard about several languages that are in crisis in the Australian school system and that certain languages require a different approach for students to successfully progress and acquire language skills.

3.41 The following section explores the impacts of the lack of continuity and limited availability of Chinese (Mandarin), Bahasa Indonesia and South Asian languages in Australian schools.

Chinese (Mandarin)

3.42 Chinese is the most widely spoken language in Australia after English and the demand for Chinese is heavily driven by diaspora communities. Many community language programs report being at capacity due to high levels of demand.³³ Chinese translation and interpreting courses at the tertiary level have also seen rising demand amongst international students.³⁴

³¹ Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 116*, p. 4.

³² See, for example, The Korean Education Centre in Sydney, *Submission 170*, p. 4; Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth and Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers' Association (BBIP and WILTA), *Submission 23.1*, pp. 9–10; JLTASA, *Submission 70*, p. 2; Mr McGregor, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 17; Mrs Brennan, APTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 3.

³³ Ms Sneha Chatterjee, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Multicultural Affairs Division, Department of Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 6; Dr Mandy Scott, Public Officer, Association for Learning Mandarin Australia (ALMA), *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, pp. 47–49; Chinese Language Teachers' Association of Victoria (CLTAV), *Submission 85*, p. 1.

³⁴ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 7–8.

- 3.43 For the provision of Chinese in the formal education system, there are higher levels of integration in the school system than with other Asian languages, however, barriers persist in the availability of continuous language learning and recognition of prior study in community settings.
- 3.44 In Australia, there are 10 schools which offer bilingual education in Chinese. Seven of these schools are government schools. Only four of these seven schools have a pathway to continue language education from primary to secondary school.³⁵
- 3.45 Of all the priority Asian languages, Chinese demands the greatest investment of time and sustained effort to reach a useful level of proficiency. Precisely because it requires this long-term commitment, Chinese is the language most damaged by the lack of consistent pathways through the education system.
- 3.46 It requires several years of study and what has been described as a ‘ladder’ approach of opportunities. As expressed by the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board:
- The Advisory Board sees the need for a ‘ladder’ of academic and professional opportunities for young people to attract, develop and sustain China expertise through study and career. A well functioning ecosystem of China capability would see stable rungs young Australians could climb from high schools into universities, and from universities into our institutions of government and business in order to develop our China experts.³⁶
- 3.47 A student forced to stop and restart, or unable to carry the language from one level of schooling to the next, loses ground that is especially hard to recover in a language of this complexity. For Chinese more than any other priority language, continuity of study is a precondition for success.
- 3.48 Students who have reached genuine proficiency through years of immersion in primary school or community language programs frequently arrive at high school to find that the only Chinese class on offer is a beginner course designed for students with no prior exposure.
- 3.49 Faced with the prospect of starting again from scratch alongside absolute beginners, many disengage from Chinese altogether. The result is a perverse outcome in which the system's most capable young Chinese speakers are driven out of formal study at the very point where their early investment should be compounding.
- 3.50 The lack of continuity presents challenges for language acquisition and the development of advanced language skills. It is also a contributing factor for the decline in language enrolments in Year 12. Box 3.1 provides an example of a bilingual school in Australia and the challenges of the lack of continuous language learning.

³⁵ Mr Stanley Wang, Convenor, Intensive Chinese Network (ICN), *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 21.

³⁶ National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board, *Submission 112*, p. 6.

Box 3.1 Bilingual Mandarin Chinese education in Canberra, Australia

The Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia (ALMA) is a community-based association in Canberra operating the Chinese Australian Early Childhood Centre—a bilingual education program which supports children from six months of age until they start primary school.

The ALMA early childhood centre is located on the grounds of Mawson Primary School in Canberra, and after consultation with school leaders at Mawson Primary, a Mandarin bilingual education program was implemented, allowing a pathway from early childhood to primary school. At Mawson Primary, half the curriculum is delivered in Mandarin, and half is delivered in English, fully aligned with the Australian Curriculum.

Mawson Primary students looking to continue Mandarin Chinese in secondary school usually transition into English–medium secondary schools ‘where opportunities to maintain and develop their Mandarin proficiency are limited to weekly language classes’.³⁷ This is despite demand from parents for their children to continue with their language studies once they reach Year 7.

There is no secondary continuation program in the ACT that sustains immersion–based learning. In the ACT, Mawson High School offers Mandarin but it is a beginner’s class and language speakers of all levels are often put into one class. This can deter students from enrolling as they are not able to advance their language skills. Without the secondary continuation pathway, ‘students miss the critical years when academic and analytical language skills should deepen and consolidate’.³⁸

- 3.51 Students also face disadvantages between what language skills they possess and what is recognised by the school system. The Council of Chinese Language Schools Victoria discussed the misalignment between students’ language capabilities and what is offered in mainstream schooling:

Before students go into [VCE], if they haven't been doing Chinese in the mainstream classroom with a certificate for year 10 competency, they should be able to join [VCE] Chinese learning or [VCE] language learning because that shows that proficiency and also recognises their pathway for the past 10 years. At the moment, some primary schools don't offer Chinese as a language. Then what happens with our community language students is that they learn Chinese from grade 1 to grade 6. When they go into year 7, when the school has Chinese, they will be like: 'I have done six or seven years of Chinese. If I join the mainstream Chinese classrooms, it might not be suitable for my needs.' Some kids will just do weekend schools for their community language and pick a different language at school.³⁹

³⁷ ALMA, *Submission 47*, p. 1.

³⁸ ALMA, *Submission 47*, p. 1; Dr Scott and Ms Yue (Rachel) Qiu, Treasurer, ALMA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, pp. 47–50.

³⁹ Ms Delan Lin, Member, Council of Chinese Language Schools Victoria, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 25.

- 3.52 The situation is further exacerbated as it impacts advanced language and cultural capability and study at the tertiary level.
- 3.53 Box 3.2 outlines the work of the Australian National University's Australian Centre for China in the World to improve continuity and depth of Chinese studies. This sequenced, cross-institutional approach, and its partnership with the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations to fund the pathways of language and cultural studies is a model of what a coherent national pathway could look like if it were properly funded and scaled.

Box 3.2 ANU's Australian Centre on China in the World⁴⁰

The Australian National University's Centre for China in the World (CIW) is building a sustainable pathway from local schools through to postgraduate study. Rather than rely on any single program, it has built a sequence of opportunities that meets students at one stage and carries them to the next.

Reaching into schools: CIW maintains a two-way connection with local schools that teach in a bilingual curriculum and works with the Chinese-language schools and community-language community in Canberra to encourage continuous study from an early start. The community-run bilingual Mandarin program at Mawson Primary School, which begins in early childhood and which the Centre engages with, is one such local program.

Entry to tertiary study: CIW supports intensive in-country language and field-study courses in China for students with no prior Chinese, funded through the New Colombo Plan. CIW has taken 130 students to China on three-to-four-week programs, and in 2025 opened them to students from La Trobe University and the University of Canberra alongside the ANU.

Bridge to advanced study: CIW provides an Advanced Honours/Masters Preparation program, funded by the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations, which over three years has brought 52 students from 16 universities together with academics from six universities and with business and policy leaders, to show them the pathways into advanced China studies.

Postgraduate, in-country, non-degree study: the China Studies Fellowships, funded by a \$1 million NFACR grant, which will support 50 Australian graduates from any discipline (2025–2028) to spend a year in Suzhou at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University studying intensive Chinese language, politics, history and economy, paired with an internship or research project. The program creates a new entry point into deep China capability for graduates whose undergraduate study did not offer one.

⁴⁰ Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW), *Submission 117*.

Deep academic expertise: CIW funds the development of deep China expertise through a grant of up to \$50,000 to support focused workshops for academic publications that promote understanding of China and the Chinese world. CIW funds Travel Grants to support research or conference visits for advanced researchers who have a focus on China, Taiwan, or Chinese diaspora. CIW also funds Chinese Studies Grants from \$10,000 to \$15,000 for ANU academic staff to research China, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora in Australia, whether in research, teaching, or engagement.

CIW reports the model is working 'each year increasing numbers of students are applying to the programs and then progressing to the next ones'.⁴¹

Bahasa Indonesia

- 3.54 While the teaching of Asian languages faces challenges across the board in Australia, the Committee heard consistent evidence that the crisis is most acute for Indonesian language teaching.
- 3.55 At the primary and secondary school level, Indonesian language programs are under threat. High rates of program closures, crashing school enrolment numbers and negative perceptions of Indonesia in media have greatly impacted the demand for Indonesian language in the traditional school system.⁴²
- 3.56 The Committee heard a consistent chorus of warnings from those closest to Indonesian language teaching that the discipline is approaching extinction. Box 3.3 outlines some of the concerns raised by witnesses.

Box 3.3 The functional extinction of Indonesian language teaching

'I think [Indonesian] is on its way to extinction. It will take longer in Victoria... But, for the other states, it is very predictable now. We are already seeing shortages of teachers and schools closing programs because they can't get teachers. It is a huge vicious cycle of attrition that is currently in Indonesian'.⁴³

'Without intervention, it is functionally gone in Queensland. It is on its way in South Australia, definitely on its way in Western Australia. It will retain its foothold in Victoria the longest but, even in Victoria, it is under pressure'.⁴⁴

'In WA this year we had 29 students studying year 12 Indonesian, and that is probably the lowest number we have ever had in the state... I do see in the next decade that, with all of these schools closing their language programs, lack of teachers and whatnot... you are not going to have enough students coming through that system'.⁴⁵

⁴¹ CIW, *Submission 117*, p. 4.

⁴² BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23*, p. 3; Victorian Indonesian Language Teachers Association, *Submission 34*, p. 3; The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, *Submission 44*, p. 2.

⁴³ Ms Sue Cooper, Chairperson, Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Mr Liam Prince, Director, Acicis, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Mr Brendon Cook, President, Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 39.

'I know they're definitely on a trajectory for extinction'.⁴⁶

'Year 12 enrolments in Indonesian nationally have dropped to only 542, so I wouldn't say that we're facing an existential crisis. I would say that we're in the middle of it'.⁴⁷

- 3.57 This decline is occurring alongside the growing geopolitical significance of Indonesia and Australia's increasing need to engage with and understand one of its closest neighbours and most important partners.⁴⁸ The functional extinction of Indonesian language teaching within Australian schools and universities would significantly undermine Australia's ability to effectively pursue its interests in partnership with Indonesia.⁴⁹
- 3.58 Indonesian studies programs are supported by a range of programs with various levels of connections to the formal education system. Some of the programs receive funding from federal or state government bodies and others operate as volunteer run organisations without any funding. Examples include:
- The Australia–Indonesia Centre, based at Monash University, is a consortium of leading universities from Australia and Indonesia focused on conducting applied research and promoting wider engagements and exchanges between Australia and Indonesia.⁵⁰
 - The Australian–Indonesia Institute, supported by DFAT, which facilitates grants to projects that develop partnerships in areas of shared interest for Australia and Indonesia.⁵¹
 - The Conference of Australian and Indonesian Youth (CAUSINDY), an annual four-day program bringing together young leaders aged 25–35 across Australia and Indonesia.⁵²
 - The Australia–Indonesia Youth Exchange Program, supported by DFAT, which provides immersion by young people from both Australia and Indonesia to urban and rural areas of the two nations.⁵³
 - Indonesian language teacher association and networks that voluntarily commit to extra work to support other teachers with resources, planning, support, and professional development.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Dr Louisa Field, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Professor Michele Ford, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 21.

⁴⁸ See, for example: Professor Hugh White, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 45; Mr Joel Backwell, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 41.

⁴⁹ Dr Lauren Bain, First Assistant Secretary, Southeast Asia Maritime Division, Office of Southeast Asia, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 3.

⁵⁰ The Australia–Indonesia Centre, *Submission 103*, p. 1.

⁵¹ DFAT, *Submission 145*, p. 5.

⁵² CAUSINDY (Conference of Australian and Indonesian Youth), *Submission 147*, p. 2.

⁵³ The Australia–Indonesia Centre, *Submission 103*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Canberra Indonesian Teachers, *Submission 76*, pp. 1–3; Mrs Brennan, APTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 9.

3.59 There are also several programs which aim to focus connections between heritage language speakers and the formal education system by supporting student teachers and teachers from Indonesia to travel to Australia and work in Australian classrooms. Examples of these programs include:

- The Western Australian Department of Education Language Assistant program. This program places language assistants with government schools. Around three language assistants are recruited from Indonesia each year.
- The Indonesian Language Teaching Assistant (ILTA) program, run by the Indonesian Embassy in Canberra, brings undergraduate teachers from the top four education universities in Indonesia to spend a term or semester at selected schools.
- The Victorian Government Department of Education funds a Language Assistant program for government schools where graduates from Indonesia spend a semester at a school assisting with the Indonesian program.
- The Indonesian Language Learning Ambassador program run by the Australia Awards Indonesia allows postgraduate students to participate in a short series of school visits once per semester.⁵⁵

3.60 These programs provide important linkages and exposure in the education system. Heritage Indonesian language teaching assistants play a critical role in showing students a contemporary and personalised perspective on the study of Indonesia that is difficult to replicate with course material alone.

In discussing the connection between heritage language speakers and the formal education system, Pondok Bahasa stated:

One effective example has been the Victorian Language Assistants Program, where Indonesian-speaking assistants worked alongside classroom teachers. In schools that participated, these assistants provided more than conversational exposure. They supported lesson planning, assisted with resource development, and offered students a personalised and contemporary perspective on Indonesia. From a teaching perspective, this strengthened cultural authenticity and reduced workload; from a student perspective, it made the language feel current, human, and connected to real people rather than abstract examples.⁵⁶

3.61 At the university level, there are also a myriad of initiatives aimed at engaging students with Indonesia.

⁵⁵ BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23.1*, pp. 3–4; Pondok Bahasa, *Submission 73.1*, pp. 7–8; The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, *Submission 44*, pp. 7–10.

⁵⁶ Pondok Bahasa, *Submission 73.1*, p. 7.

- 3.62 The efforts by various groups and heritage language speakers to connect language and cultural studies to the formal education system showcase the value of providing students with direct engagement with the country of study. However, these programs operate in isolation from one another, and despite the success of individual programs the overall efforts have not resulted in more Australian students studying Indonesia.

South Asian languages: under-represented at Australian schools

- 3.63 South Asian languages have a strong and growing community presence. Hindi and Punjabi are among the most widely spoken community languages in Australia. Yet, opportunities for students to study these languages in mainstream schools have remained comparatively limited.
- 3.64 In his submission to the Inquiry, Dr Gary Bonar identified several related system issues, including fragmented teacher-education pathways, professional isolation among language teachers, under-use of diaspora knowledge and multilingual repertoires, and weak alignment between student interest, curriculum design and assessment.⁵⁷
- 3.65 The Hindi and Punjabi Languages Initiative developed through Monash University provides an example of how these challenges might be addressed through targeted professional learning and collaborative partnerships between universities, schools and education systems.
- 3.66 The Hindi and Punjabi Languages Initiative sought to strengthen teacher capability and support the expansion of language pathways through a structured professional learning model. The program was delivered in 2025 by Monash University as a 16-week (approximately 200 hour) professional learning micro-credential focused on contemporary language teaching methodology. It was designed for teachers and educators who already possessed Hindi or Punjabi language capability but required further preparation in curriculum-aligned language pedagogy.⁵⁸

Securing Asian language learning across the school system

- 3.67 The objective of universal access to Asian language learning provision pursued across Australia in the 1990s under NALSAS is long gone. The immediate objective today is no longer promoting the breadth of teaching but ensuring survival of the capability within the Australian education system.

⁵⁷ Dr Gary Bonar, *Submission 166.1*.

⁵⁸ Dr Gary Bonar, *Submission 166.1*.

- 3.68 The Committee heard that if Asian language teaching continues to decline, it will fall below the critical mass needed to sustain the institutional infrastructure on which all language teaching depends. The language teaching profession requires professional networks, curriculum development, specialist teacher training and classroom materials that cannot viably be maintained for a handful of programs scattered thinly across the country. Securing what remains and rebuilding around it requires a deliberate strategy to concentrate and protect teaching capability rather than allow it to dissipate further.
- 3.69 'Asia Leader Schools' or a 'lighthouse' school model was proposed as one mechanism to reduce the barriers to sustain Asian language teaching capability within state and territory education systems.
- 3.70 An Asia Leader School would act as a centre of excellence and expertise for the teaching of a particular Asian language and serve as a hub to share resources and support other schools to offer Asian languages.
- 3.71 Under this model, schools that demonstrate commitment to sustaining the study of a particular Asian language would receive financial and other forms of support from the Australian Government in order to preserve and develop pedagogical best practice and share it with other interested schools.
- 3.72 As proposed by Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth and the Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association, Asia Leader Schools would receive the following incentives:
- Government funding for:
 - a part time or full-time language and cultural studies administrator
 - one in-country professional learning each year for the language teacher cultural studies teacher, and school manager
 - an in-country immersive school language and culture camp for students
 - hosting a language and cultural studies regional summit
 - a part time or full-time background language assistant.
 - Access to fast-track online language learning for students and staff as an extension program.⁵⁹
- 3.73 To be considered as an Asia Leader School, nominating schools would need to meet selection criteria, such as leadership commitment to Asian language and cultural studies, pre-existing demonstration of continuous language offerings (including into senior secondary years), in-country exchange programs, commitment to language and cultural studies teaching positions, and regular extra-curricular activities embedded within the school calendar.

⁵⁹ BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23*, pp. 9–11.

- 3.74 To receive the incentives the school would need to demonstrate a sustained or improved uptake in language and cultural programs each year, partner with universities to support students, lead and mentor other schools, facilitate language and cultural studies teachers to participate in in-country professional development, produce resources, and administrative obligations such as annual reports.
- 3.75 In the short term, this model would be used to secure and strengthen established school programs, and in the long term create a network of schools around the Asia Leader School to improve uptake of Asian language and Asian cultural studies. These schools would preserve the capability needed to regrow the interest and uptake in Asian language and cultural studies, securing a sustainable pipeline of learning. These schools could also partner with universities to assist with developing curriculum resources, supporting immersion programs, and teacher training.⁶⁰

Why bother? Factors influencing student choice

- 3.76 A range of other factors influencing students' decisions to refrain from studying Asian languages were identified, including:
- perceived negative effects of Asian language study on university admissions
 - negative social attitudes towards Asia and perceptions about learning a language, and
 - the rise of translation technologies and artificial intelligence (AI).

Not my ATAR!

- 3.77 Asian languages are perceived by students to scale poorly for their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and subsequent admission into university. This perception means that many students do not pursue language studies due to a belief that language subjects will negatively affect their ATAR.⁶¹
- 3.78 Subject scaling and the calculation of ATARs are managed by the responsible state and territory university admissions bodies. An ATAR ranks a student's performance in a subject and relative position in comparison with their peer group.
- 3.79 Experiences of students navigating language choices and the ATAR system are outlined in Box 3.4.

⁶⁰ BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23*, pp. 9–11; Canberra Indonesian Teachers, *Submission 76*, pp. 3–4; Dr Zara Maxwell-Smith, *Submission 118*, pp. 4–5; Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 116*, p. 9; AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 9.

⁶¹ See, for example, Mr Michael Kramer, *Submission 8*, p. 1; University of Tasmania, *Submission 42*, p. 2; LTAT, *Submission 63*, p. 3; Dr Rowena Ward, *Submission 92*, pp. 2–3.

Box 3.4 Students' perception of ATAR scaling

'From Year 10 to Year 11, nearly my entire cohort of second-language Chinese learners quit the subject. What had been a group of approximately 20 students—interested, competent, and passionate—was whittled down to two. People understood implicitly that to study the language in the final years of high school, as a second language learner, was to put your ATAR on the line'.⁶²

'We were advised by multiple parties including teachers, school guidance counsellors, and tutors that our child should **not** continue with Chinese past [Year 10] as it could negatively impact the optimisation of an expected high ATAR'.⁶³

'When my son was choosing subjects in high school in Years 11 and 12, he steered away from language subjects and chose things that he wasn't necessarily passionate about, like physics, because he felt that that was going to help him to get to where he wanted with his ATAR'.⁶⁴

- 3.80 Some evidence suggested that Asian languages, such as Korean, were ranked lower than languages such as Ancient Greek. However, the Committee did not receive conclusive evidence regarding whether Asian languages were scaled poorly compared to other languages and subjects across Australia.⁶⁵
- 3.81 Regardless of whether Asian languages are scaled lower than other languages and subjects, the poor perception persists and negatively influences students' choices to enrol in Asian languages in Years 11 and 12.⁶⁶
- 3.82 Inquiry participants suggested implementing and expanding bonus points for students studying Asian languages. Bonus ATAR points have been used to incentivise language study in the past, such as the Victorian 'Languages Other Than English (LOTE) bonuses' program.⁶⁷

⁶² Hayley Winchcombe, Lauren Alexander, Mikaylie Page, Yige Xu, and Racheline Tantular, *Submission 120*, p. 5.

⁶³ Name withheld, *Submission 185*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Mrs Jennifer Rickard, Board Member, ACSSO, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Dr Ken Cruickshank, Director, Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education (SICLE), University of Sydney, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 38.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Mrs Brennan, APTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 5; Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, Fellow, AAH, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 9; Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 16.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Indonesia Council, Monash Herb Feith Indonesian Engagement Centre and Acicis, *Submission 1*, p. 2; Acicis, *Submission 75*, p. 6; AAH, *Submission 64.1*, p. 6; Professor Melissa Crouch, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 20; Professor Heather Sharon Zwicker, Executive Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 10; Mrs Rickard, ACSSO, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 6.

- 3.83 Reflecting on her decision to continue studying Japanese in senior secondary school, Ms Hayley Winchcombe told the Committee:

The two motivators for me to continue studying Japanese were the LOTE bonus and the availability ... That ATAR bonus was I think, 10 per cent of my score added onto my score, and that was a big incentive for me.⁶⁸

- 3.84 On the other hand, the Committee received evidence which indicated that bonus points reward and attract students who already do well in languages and do not substantially alter students' decision to study a language.⁶⁹

Why do I need to learn about Asia?

- 3.85 Social attitudes, perceptions of the difficulty of learning an Asian language, and the role of emerging translation technologies were also discussed as barriers and having a negative impact on student engagement with the study of Asia.

Social attitudes

- 3.86 Despite periodic attention from policy makers, language learning is not the norm in Australia's education system. English, a widely used language internationally, is Australia's dominant language. This leads to the perception that learning another language is not necessary as English is enough.⁷⁰
- 3.87 The attitudes in Australia's education system towards bilingualism and multilingualism differ when compared to other nations.⁷¹ In 2018, only 36 per cent of Australian students studied a second language, leaving Australia at second last amongst 64 countries surveyed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).⁷²
- 3.88 Other nations have deeply embedded language and cultural learning within their education systems, for example:
- The United States of America has more than 3,600 bilingual schools.
 - Edmonton, Canada, a city of 1.2 million people has 14 bilingual Chinese schools offering pathways from kinder to Year 12.
 - Integration of linguistic and cultural elements across the curriculum via collaboration with language teachers in Finland.

⁶⁸ Ms Hayley Winchcombe, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 22.

⁶⁹ Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 116*, p. 4; Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 16.

⁷⁰ See, for example: BBIP WILTA, *Submission 23*, p. 6; Australia–Indonesia Youth Association, *Submission 88*, p. 4; Professor Lo Bianco, AAH, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, pp. 5–6.

⁷¹ BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23*, p. 6.

⁷² Ms Samuelson, DoE, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 4; Business Council of Australia, *Submission 165*, p. 1

- A ‘mother tongue’ policy in Singapore, where both English and students’ background language is mandated and supported throughout mainstream education.
 - Targeted strategies for Pacific languages connecting education policy to identity in New Zealand.⁷³
- 3.89 Beyond language acquisition, the study of Asia itself is impacted by social attitudes and opinions. Perceptions formed from geopolitical events and uncertainty in the Asian region can negatively impact student demand due to poor perceptions of Asian governments or societies.⁷⁴
- 3.90 Independent Schools Australia highlighted the effects of these misplaced negative attitudes:
- Despite geographic proximity, Asia is often perceived as culturally ‘distant’ by some cohorts within Australian society. We have seen how this perception can be easily exploited by social media campaigns seeking to politicise and re-shape Australia’s migration policies. Unfortunately, negative public discourse can too easily impact student interest in and parental support for Asian studies and languages.⁷⁵
- 3.91 Similarly, APTA commented on the disparate views and value of studying Asia in school settings:
- Societal attitudes toward Asia capability vary considerably across schools and communities. The extent to which Asia’s strategic importance is recognised often depends on the leadership of individual educators and school principals, as well as the cultural orientation of the surrounding community. In many areas, migration from Asia has reshaped the cultural landscape, creating opportunities to embed Asia literacy more deeply in educational settings.⁷⁶
- 3.92 Engaging students and building Australia’s Asia capability requires a change in these social attitudes and opinions towards the region.⁷⁷

The unique complexity of learning an Asian language

- 3.93 Asian languages are generally classified as hard or very hard languages to learn in international foreign service language rankings.

⁷³ Monash Japanese Language Education Centre, *Submission 140*, p. 5; Dr Wei Li, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, pp. 8-9; ICN, *Submission 82*, p. 4; Dr Jennifer Hsu, *Submission 100*, pp. 2-3.

⁷⁴ BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23.1*, p. 5; JLTASA, *Submission 70*, p. 4; Ms Hingor Chung, *Submission 14*, p. 10.

⁷⁵ ISA, *Submission 175*, p. 6.

⁷⁶ APTA, *Submission 58*, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Professor Kate Darian-Smith, President, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 6.

- 3.94 The National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board expressed how learning a foreign language, particularly an Asian language such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, is highly difficult for English speakers:

Chinese is a difficult language. The Foreign Service Institute places Chinese in its most difficult category, alongside Arabic, Japanese and Korean, for 'languages which are exceptionally difficult for native English speakers'. Chinese is a tonal language and it requires the knowledge of at least 3,000 characters for basic reading proficiency, with little shared vocabulary with English. It typically requires 2-5 years of full-time study to achieve advanced proficiency.⁷⁸

- 3.95 This flows through to the perception among students that Asian language subjects are harder and require more effort than other languages.⁷⁹

- 3.96 Mr Ryley Walley, a former New Colombo Plan Scholar, explained how these perceptions alter student choice:

Languages that are more closely related to English tend to be easier to acquire, whereas languages that [are] more distantly related tend to be more difficult. Therefore, most students favour European languages, even though some Asian languages such as Indonesian or Malay are relatively similar in difficulty to most European languages, and some such as Hindi or Vietnamese are just as difficult as European languages like Greek or Hebrew.⁸⁰

- 3.97 Pondok Bahasa also explained that even when studying Indonesian, which uses a romanised script, students still encounter unfamiliar sounds, structures and social contexts, reinforcing the perception that Indonesian is 'too hard' or not meant for them.⁸¹

Integrated learning as a pedagogical model

- 3.98 The time allocated to language learning in the classroom was also raised as a concern to student engagement and progress. As discussed above, there is variation in how languages are taught in Australia. For example, in the Northern Territory, some programs offer two hours of language learning per week while other schools provide up to five hours.⁸²
- 3.99 In discussing this issue, the Intensive Chinese Network told the Committee that 'you might as well not run a language' when the industry standard is 40 to 50 minutes of instruction per week. They further explained the impacts of limited instruction time on students:

⁷⁸ National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board, *Submission 112*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ See, for example, ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 4; AFMLTA, *Submission 104.1*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Mr Ryley Walley, *Submission 159*, p. 5.

⁸¹ Pondok Bahasa, *Submission 73.1*, p. 3.

⁸² LTANT, *Submission 130*, p. 1.

... if a student is not going to have an empowering and engaging experience where they are really motivated to want to study—because they're interrupted every second week by house athletics, and they're constantly doing the same things because they can't remember what they did last week or the week before.⁸³

- 3.100 A breadth of evidence was received on how to reduce the perceptions and barriers relating to the difficulty of learning a language. Many inquiry participants discussed the role and successes of 'Content and Language Integrated Learning' (CLIL) and bilingual classrooms in producing fluency and cultural competency.
- 3.101 CLIL involves teaching a non-language subject is taught in the target language. Bilingual classrooms are similar in that there is an immersive approach to language learning but the ratio of foreign language to English language instruction is typically lower.⁸⁴
- 3.102 Both CLIL and bilingual models of language instruction were shown to provide significantly more exposure to languages, higher proficiency in the language, and demonstrated equal or better academic outcomes across subjects than students not in CLIL or bilingual programs. These models of language instruction also help to develop cultural literacy and communicate to students the value of learning other languages.⁸⁵

There's an app for that – the rise in translation technologies and artificial intelligence

- 3.103 Concerns were raised that students do not see the value in learning a language due to the rise of digital translation tools and AI programs. Even though translation tools are improving and can effectively translate transactional level interactions at the symbolic level, the role of learning a language goes beyond mere conversations. Language skills are important for deep understanding about a society and a culture and help build intercultural understanding and genuine connections.⁸⁶
- 3.104 The Australia Japan Society of New South Wales explained that:
- A common attitude is that digital technology such as Google Translate and generative AI will soon replace the need for language proficiency in human interaction. While such tools are indeed useful for language learning, interpreting and translation, and in tourism situations, they are tools in the hands of humans. In fact, driving such tools requires an even higher level of language knowledge to ensure that the message being generated is appropriate for purpose.⁸⁷

⁸³ Mr Wang, ICN, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 26.

⁸⁴ ICN, *Submission 82*, p. 1; AFMLTA, *Submission 104*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ AAH, *Submission 64.2*, pp. 3–4, 7; ICN, *Submission 82*, p. 2; Associate Professor Ruth Fielding, *Submission 41*, p. 2; Per Capita, *Submission 98*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 15; APPA, *Submission 12.1*, p. 4.

⁸⁷ The Australia Japan Society of NSW Inc, *Submission 142*, p. 3.

3.105 The purpose of learning a language amidst the rise of AI was also discussed. ACARA likened the study of languages and AI to the study of mathematics and said ‘... you can give someone a calculator and tell them what to plug in, but they won’t understand maths and they won’t know if the answer is wrong.’⁸⁸

3.106 The CIW discussed the role of machine translation and the ongoing importance of language learning:

AI is strong on functional exchanges but is not capable of nuance. Business and Diplomacy rely on nuance and the affective ties that come from human conversation and dialogue. China is today investing heavily in foreign language programs, the training of interpreters and translators, and Area Studies programs alongside its investment in AI tools. Chinese leaders and researchers recognise that AI is a useful tool but that it cannot replace human communication with its additional subtle signals such as eye contact, body language and affective moods....Tourists might simply need AI translators to buy a coffee; but those operating in the business, policy, strategy and education spheres need a more sophisticated expertise in foreign languages to truly excel.⁸⁹

3.107 Rather than being a substitute for language learning, innovative teachers and students are finding ways to use digital resources and AI as a tool to improve language study.⁹⁰ For example, the AFMLTA told the Committee:

We know that language learning is quite a confronting thing—to stand up in front of a class, for example, and use a language, with the anxiety and all of those challenges—whereas, when students are speaking to a screen, they actually don’t want to disappoint the screen. They keep talking to it. It’s how people use it! There are students who engage well with screens. It’s not a real, scary person; it’s a safe environment. So this is how teachers are harnessing it.⁹¹

3.108 AI is being used in classrooms and by students as ‘another kind of interlocutor’ to help improve language learning.⁹² Students have used AI as a verification tool to promote self-directed study, or to practice their speaking skills, which could become an opportunity to further facilitate language acquisition and increase access.⁹³

3.109 The proliferation of digital resources for Asian language learning has also substantially supported teachers delivering Asia-related content. Language teacher networks have been able to support teachers in delivering Asian content by sharing high-quality digital content for use in the classroom.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Mr Gniel, ACARA, *Committee Hansard*, 11 February 2026, p. 5.

⁸⁹ CIW, *Submission 117*, p. 7.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Dr Kate Delmo, *Submission 131*, p. 3; Kristien Sarwo Rini, *Submission 144*, p. 5; Chinese Australian Services Society, *Submission 178*, p. 5; Asialink, *Submission 129*, p. 7.

⁹¹ Mrs Farmer, AFMLTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 36.

⁹² Dr Kohler, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 15.

⁹³ Mrs Farmer, AFMLTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 36; Associate Professor Ruth Fielding, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 15.

⁹⁴ APTA, *Submission 58.1*, p. 10.

- 3.110 Pondok Bahasa noted that ‘teachers who are well-supported with engaging materials are more confident in their delivery, more likely to remain in the profession, and better equipped to inspire continued learning’.⁹⁵

Engaging students with Asia

- 3.111 The Committee regularly heard that immersive in-country experiences and connections with peers in Asian countries at formative moments in students’ schooling were responsible for sparking a passion and lifelong interest in Asia. Programs facilitating these experiences are critical to building Australia’s Asia capability pipeline.

Immersion and in-country experience

- 3.112 Immersive and in-country experiences make Asia come alive for students, supports the development of language proficiency, and build strong intercultural connections and understanding. Many inquiry participants called for government support and funding for in-country immersion programs for school students.⁹⁶

- 3.113 As the Australia-Korea Business Council described:

There's no substitute for going to Korea to see it, touch it, feel it and learn about Koreans. You can read as many books as you like and listen to as many podcasts as you like, but it's not until you go to Korea and you meet Koreans and you see it for yourself that you can really learn about it.⁹⁷

- 3.114 Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth expressed similar views:

...exchange to Indonesia is one of the critical things that will bring about passion and interest in students. It's one of the critical things that will actually lead to demand for Indonesian language within schools. We've also worked out that it probably needs to happen around the age of 14 or 15—for students in, say, year 9 or 10. If they get that opportunity to go to Indonesia, they are very, very likely—we've seen this happen over and over again—to have a renewed interest in Indonesian language learning at school and to be motivated to take it through to the end of school and on to university.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Pondok Bahasa, *Submission 73*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ See, for example, APTA, *Submission 58*, p. 5; Ms Winchcombe, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 20; Associate Professor Fielding, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 13; University of Sydney, *Submission 171*, p. 7; CAUSINDY (Conference of Australian and Indonesian Youth), *Submission 147*, p. 6; AFMLTA, *Submission 104*, p. 17.

⁹⁷ Mrs Elizabeth Griffin, Chief Executive Officer, Australia–Korea Business Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 12.

⁹⁸ Ms Cooper, Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 42.

- 3.115 While these programs are important, the Committee heard that there were significant risks and barriers to running overseas experiences and immersion programs for school students.
- 3.116 Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth and the Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association stated that some state and territory education departments do not allow schools to visit Indonesia and that some schools are reluctant to offer overseas experiences.⁹⁹
- 3.117 In discussing how schools manage the risks associated with international travel, the Australian Primary Principals Association said:
- As to the approvals piece, we don't manage risk; we're averse to it. That's what rules. The risk, from the school's perspective, can be managed. Teachers are really good at travelling with children and managing all of the issues. It's a great joy in my current job when I bump into groups at the airport who are absolutely so excited from an experience they've had. But the paperwork—and it's not just the paperwork; it can be the time between approvals. If you can't book a ticket until X amount of paperwork is done, by the time that's happened the fares are much more expensive and you have to revisit the whole budgeting process. I think that absolutely warrants attention—how can we have agreements about the paperwork that manages the risk, supports the participation and is not a barrier to it?¹⁰⁰
- 3.118 The Department of Education (DoE) advised that child safety is a high priority and an important consideration when approving overseas travel for school students. Some state government schools have raised concerns about the lack of mandatory background checks for host families abroad and have been unable to approve existing homestay requirements. In these cases, the international counterpart would need to introduce host family screening measures aligned with Australian standards.¹⁰¹
- 3.119 To overcome these barriers, it was suggested that the administrative, logistical and risk management costs of in-country experiences faced by schools could be minimised by consolidating these functions in a specialist body. Such a service could be based on the Australian Consortium for In Country Indonesia Studies (Acicis) which operates at the tertiary level.¹⁰² The model of support it provides could similarly be offered to secondary schools.
- 3.120 Box 3.5 below outlines the work of Acicis and the importance of the connections within the education system.

⁹⁹ BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ms Angela Falkenberg, President, APPA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, pp. 7–8.

¹⁰¹ DoE, *Submission 191.1*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁰² Acicis, *Submission 75*, pp. 1–12; Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 116*, p. 9.

Box 3.5 The Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies

Acicis is a non-profit consortium which comprises 19 Australian member universities and one university based in the Netherlands, which partners with eight host universities in Indonesia. It was established in 1994 in Perth as a mechanism to overcome barriers for Australian university students to study in Indonesia by leveraging economies of scale. Acicis received seed funding of \$200,000 from the DoE. Almost 5,000 Australian students have lived, studied, and undertaken internships in Indonesia through Acicis.¹⁰³

Acicis has played a significant role in training Australia's third generation of Indonesia specialists. Several participants of Acicis are now mid-career and are in Australia's consular missions in the region and Indonesian focused sections of various Commonwealth agencies, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Office of National Intelligence, the Department of Defence, the Australian Signals Directorate, and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation among others. In 2024, Australia's High Commissioner to Brunei, the Consul-General in Makassar, and Deputy Consul-General in Surabaya were all Acicis graduates.¹⁰⁴

School partnerships

3.121 In addition to immersive overseas experiences, other programs like sister-school partnerships and digital classrooms have been successful in igniting student interest with Asia.

3.122 These programs offer the opportunity for students to engage with their peers and classrooms in Asia. It is often through these experiences that the importance of Asia is realised, and authentic long-term engagement is fostered.¹⁰⁵

3.123 ACSSO highlighted the positive impacts that can be garnered through school partnerships:

Partnerships matter. A video call with peers in Hanoi or a visit to a sister school in Japan makes Asia come alive for students. Families see the difference: children come home with stories, friendships, and confidence that no textbook can provide. Initiatives such as the BRIDGE program demonstrate how authentic, ongoing collaboration with peers in Asia can transform students' understanding and make intercultural learning real. Families value these opportunities because they move beyond textbooks, enabling their children to form genuine relationships across borders.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Acicis, *Submission 75*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Mr Prince, Acicis, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ BBIP and WILTA, *Submission 23*, p. 8; Victorian Indonesian Language Teachers' Association, *Submission 34*, p. 3; CLTAV, *Submission 85*, p. 2; Australia-Indonesia Centre, *Submission 103*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 9.

- 3.124 Several submitters and witnesses pointed to initiatives such as the Building Relationships through Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement (BRIDGE) program as a good practice model which supports the creation of digital sister-school relations, and prompts student interest at a young age.¹⁰⁷
- 3.125 The BRIDGE program is an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Grant funding is provided to schools to foster relationships with the region. There are two BRIDGE programs running, one for Indonesia and another focusing on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- 3.126 BRIDGE programs are designed to develop relationships, particularly for schools outside major cities, and enable a richer educational experience for the students and teachers.
- 3.127 In 2024-25, 38 primary and secondary schools were selected for the ASEAN–Australia’s BRIDGE school partnership program.¹⁰⁸ A review of the BRIDGE Indonesia program found that ‘sustained school–to–school partnerships lift intercultural confidence and provide replicable models for regional engagement’.¹⁰⁹
- 3.128 These programs are organised by individual schools and there is not a mechanism coordinating the approach across the education system.
- 3.129 The DoE noted that while school programs are the responsibility of the states and territories, the Commonwealth can advocate for opportunities and highlight the importance of Australia’s relations with particular partner countries. It also engages through the Commonwealth, State and Territory International Education Forum to develop and implement national policy priorities for the sector.¹¹⁰

Workforce shortages and challenges

- 3.130 Teachers play a critical role in engaging students with the study of Asia and its languages. A significant challenge in building Asia capability within the education system is the significant shortage of language teachers.
- 3.131 Other barriers in delivering Asia-focused content in schools include varying levels of school leadership and support, as well as the difficulties in teaching about Asia in an engaging and authentic manner.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example: Asialink, *Submission 129*, p. 7; ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 3; Clarice Campbell, *Submission 157*, p. 4; Professor Michael Wesley, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global, Culture and Engagement, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 13.

¹⁰⁸ Ms Fiona Hoggart, Head of ASEAN-Australia Centre, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 5; Senator the Hon Penny Wong, ‘ASEAN-Australia Centre grants and BRIDGE School Partnerships’, *Media Release*, 3 March 2025.

¹⁰⁹ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ DoE, *Submission 191.1*, p. 23.

Language teacher shortages

- 3.132 Australia has among the highest rates of teacher shortages in the OECD and has a significant shortage of language teachers.¹¹¹ Many schools struggle to hire and retain language teachers and sustain language programs once the teacher leaves. The Committee heard about out-of-field teaching arrangements regularly being used to fill teacher shortages.¹¹²
- 3.133 Out-of-field teaching occurs when a teacher is teaching one subject within a Key Learning Area where they have not studied this subject at university for at least one semester, for both subject content and pedagogy.
- 3.134 According to 2023 data from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data Teacher Survey, approximately 30 per cent of secondary school Languages Other Than English teachers were teaching out-of-field. This out-of-field proportion was the equal fourth highest across all Key Learning Areas in 2023. Specific data for out-of-field teaching for Asian languages is not available.¹¹³
- 3.135 These mechanisms are an important element of allowing language programs to run but the reliance on these arrangements can have negative consequences for the student in terms of program quality, continuity, and experience of learning a language. Teaching out-of-field is often shown to have poorer quality teaching and as a result children and young people do not have strong outcomes.¹¹⁴
- 3.136 The lack of available language teachers can also lead to disruptions to students learning a language and the closure of language programs.¹¹⁵

The experiences of language teachers

- 3.137 Teaching an Asian language at an Australian school can be an isolating experience.
- 3.138 Asian language teachers are generally the sole teacher of the language at the school and carry the burden of responsibility for the sustainability of their language programs with little professional support.
- 3.139 The Committee heard that 'Asian language education in Australia has long relied on the passion of individual educators and the goodwill of communities, but passion alone cannot overcome system barriers'¹¹⁶ and that high school language programs 'live and die based on the teachers'.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, *Submission 49*, p. 4.

¹¹² Language Teachers Association of the Northern Territory (LTANT) - Japanese Language Representative, *Submission 125*, p. 2; UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 4.

¹¹³ DoE *Submission 191*, p. 8; DoE *Submission 191.2*, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Ms Samuelson, DoE, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 4; LTANT – Japanese Language Representative, *Submission 124*, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ APPA, *Submission 12*, p. 2; ASSA, *Submission 67*, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ Mr Chad Birks, *Submission 9*, p. 5.

¹¹⁷ ASAA, *Submission 67*, p. 5.

3.140 The shortage of language teachers was not attributed to a lack of qualified individuals but rather to the conditions that they face in schools and the classrooms. As Dr Gary Bonar explained 'Language teachers are essential to building Asia capability but face professional and structural barriers that limit their influence'.¹¹⁸

3.141 Language teachers experience their field being undervalued and as an optional extra, work in isolation, and have limited access to resources and support.¹¹⁹

3.142 The Languages Teacher Association of Tasmania aptly described the conditions faced by language teachers:

Language teachers for all languages are in short supply, however this is not due to a shortage of qualified individuals. Often in Tasmania language teachers are required to teach between multiple schools and travel unsafe roads in the dark and ice for long periods during the year. Schools do not have space for dedicated classrooms, with many teachers running from class-to-class and running a mobile classroom from their cars. School budgets are limited for resources, and postage and shipping of language specific resources to Tasmania is exorbitant. Our current assessment systems see many language teachers overworked. There are many Tasmanian classroom-based teachers who could offer a language, but the itinerant conditions are so poor that many refuse due to the negative impacts on wellbeing.¹²⁰

3.143 Several submitters and witnesses expressed concerns about the working conditions faced by language teachers. Box 3.6 provides an example of working as a language teacher in Australia.

Box 3.6 The realities of the language teaching profession

'I want to start by painting a picture of what it's like to be an early career language teacher in Australia. Picture that you are about 23 years old, you've just finished your language teaching degree and you walk into your new school. You're the only language teacher. There's no-one to show you the curriculum and no-one to help you plan, and your head of department might be a science or music teacher. On the other hand, if you are a history teacher and you are walking into a new school, you'd be paired with an experienced colleague to guide you and show you through all these things. For languages you're alone, and the entire future of your subject in your school now rests with you. And you need to also ensure that enough students choose to take your class [so] that you might have a group of senior students in a few years' time. This is not an anecdote; this is our system and this is why the language learning pipeline is not secure'.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Dr Gary Bonar, *Submission 166*, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Ms Hingor Chung, *Submission 14*, p. 1; Dr Gary Bonar, *Submission 166*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ LTAT, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

¹²¹ Dr Field, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 10.

- 3.144 Many stakeholders also reported that language teachers struggle with insecure employment, such as working on contracts across multiple schools or only being able to work part time, and the compounding nature of these factors leads qualified teachers to leave the profession.¹²²
- 3.145 To succeed in the classrooms and their profession, language teachers require access to appropriate training and resources, continuing professional development and networks, and support from school leadership.¹²³
- 3.146 Several ideas were presented for how to better support Asian language teachers.
- 3.147 It was highlighted that the language teaching profession is a young profession with high rates of attrition, however, there is no policy to support beginning and early career language teachers.¹²⁴ The role of professional teacher association and networks was raised as a key mechanism to support early career language teachers.
- 3.148 Teacher associations play a critical role in providing access not only to useful resources, but to other teachers facing similar experiences while providing an opportunity for teachers to discuss professional challenges with one another. These associations and networks also act as a hub for mentoring arrangements and providing teachers with opportunities for professional development.¹²⁵
- 3.149 Professor Lesley Harbon highlighted the significant impact of language teacher associations, and told the Committee that:
- Language associations and language teacher associations are highly sought-after saviours for many a teacher who has to prepare this by then and is wondering whether there are any colleagues out there with resources they can share.¹²⁶
- 3.150 Dr Michelle Kohler emphasised that local language teaching associations play a vital role in whether people starting out in the language teaching profession remain in the field. She further noted that teacher associations have 'an incredible influence there just in that survival period but also with curriculum pedagogy and the network, that sense of belonging to the profession'.¹²⁷

She also told the Committee that the need for action on this from was similarly urgent and that her association 'has nearly folded multiple times over the last few years... it is hanging on by a thread. So, if I had to do anything immediately, that's where I'd go'.¹²⁸

¹²² See, for example, ACSSO, *Submission 10.1*, p. 1; CLTAV, *Submission 85*, p. 1.

¹²³ Dr Gary Bonar, *Submission 166*, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Ms Jaime Nakahara, *Submission 143*, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Language Teachers Victoria, *Submission 156*, pp. 2–3; Modern Language Teachers Association of South Australia, *Submission 139*, p. 1; APTA, *Submission 58*, pp. 6–7.

¹²⁶ Professor Lesley Harbon, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 15.

¹²⁷ Dr Kohler, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 16.

¹²⁸ Dr Kohler, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 16.

- 3.151 It was suggested that pre-service teachers could be paired with a mentor from a language teacher association before they leave university to support their transition into the classroom.¹²⁹
- 3.152 A challenge facing teacher associations is that unlike other subject matter teacher associations, Asian language teacher associations are run by teachers on a volunteer basis.¹³⁰ The Committee heard that many of these associations are ‘running on the smell of an oily rag’¹³¹ and that several are ‘hanging on by a thread’.¹³²
- 3.153 The resources and opportunities these networks provide require sustained funding to be effective and support teachers.¹³³
- 3.154 Funding for teacher associations and networks would better help these associations build teacher capability and provide support to teachers in the workforce, improve student experience and reduce teacher burnout.

Efforts to increase supply of language teachers

- 3.155 Australia’s teacher shortage has been identified as a priority area in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (the Action Plan). As a part of the Action Plan, the Australian Government has implemented several initiatives to increase the supply of teachers, including an additional 4,036 Commonwealth Supported Places for initial teacher education, Commonwealth teaching scholarships for initial teacher education students, a national campaign and the High Achieving Teachers (HAT) program.
- 3.156 These initiatives have led to an increase in the number of initial teacher education commencements and completions. From 2023 to 2024 commencements grew by 14 per cent and completions grew by 6 per cent.¹³⁴
- 3.157 A challenge within these initiatives is how to increase engagement in language learning and in turn attracting those people into the teaching profession. The Department of Education suggested that the HAT program is one mechanism that may support this endeavour.
- 3.158 HAT commenced in 2020 and supports alternative pathways into teaching for high achieving individuals. Participants are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds and are targeted for the knowledge, skills and experiences needed in schools. They are placed in schools experiencing teacher shortages and receive a high level of training and support while they complete an Australian accredited teaching qualification.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Dr Field, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 15.

¹³⁰ Mrs Brennan, APTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 1; Dr Scott, ALMA., *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 50.

¹³¹ Dr Zara Maxwell-Smith, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 15.

¹³² Dr Kohler, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 16.

¹³³ Language Teachers Victoria, *Submission 156*, p. 3; Canberra Indonesian Teachers, *Submission 76*, p. 2; APTA, *Submission 58*, p. 3.

¹³⁴ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 8.

¹³⁵ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 8.

3.159 The education profession has also been a focus of Australia's skilled migration programs for around four years and there has been growth in the numbers of primary and secondary school teachers entering Australia. Language assistants, whose duties are most likely to align with those of teachers' aides are not eligible for a skilled visa.¹³⁶

3.160 One challenge of these programs, for language teachers, is how these teachers are accredited through the relevant state or territory language department to commence teaching in schools.¹³⁷

3.161 At present, internationally trained teachers face a high barrier in the English language testing requirements to teach in Australian schools. Teachers are required to have a score of 7.5 in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), with a minimum of 8 in listening and speaking and a minimum of 7 in reading and writing.

In comparison, for medical doctors with an overseas specialist qualification, the IELTS requirement is 7 overall.¹³⁸

3.162 In responding to questions about the English language requirements for international trained teachers, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission told the Committee:

It's a conversation that has been had before what the level should be for writing and speaking for teachers. As you rightly say, it's a standard set that is nationally agreed upon. One of the issues associated with this is that teaching is primarily a career of transmittal of information through oral means, and excellent English language speaking is required to ensure that students are adequately engaged in the classroom and can adequately engage with the teacher. So there's a general view that there is a very high standard that is required. I think that that has basically been agreed upon and has been fairly consistently supported over the years.¹³⁹

3.163 Another challenge for overseas qualified teachers and heritage language speakers are the cultural differences in Australian classrooms. Inquiry participants told the Committee that those with culturally diverse backgrounds need support to understand how the Australian school system operates and the expectations and behaviours of students in the classroom.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 109.1*, p. 1; Mr Michael Willard, Deputy Secretary, Immigration Programs Group, Department of Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 7.

¹³⁷ Department of Home Affairs, *Submission 109.1*, p. 1; Mr Willard, Department of Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 7.

¹³⁸ Dr Cruickshank, SICLE, University of Sydney, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 34; Associate Professor Jing Qi, Program Manager, RMIT Community Languages Teacher Education Program, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 34.

¹³⁹ Mr David Turvey, Executive Director, Australian Tertiary Education Commission, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Dr Maxwell-Smith, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 14; Mr Wang, ICN, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 22.

- 3.164 The role of community language programs and their relationship with the formal education system are discussed in depth in Chapter five.

Empowering teachers to teach about Asia

- 3.165 The development of Asia capability extends beyond the teaching and acquisition of Asian languages. The cross-curriculum priority 'Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia' and the general capability of intercultural understanding are designed to complement one another and equip students with the knowledge and understanding of the diversity of Asia and the skills and values needed to engage with Asia.
- 3.166 Teaching about Asia and instilling intercultural capabilities requires professional training and experience like any other subject of the curriculum. A key challenge affecting the delivery of Asia-focused content in the Australian Curriculum is the limited exposure to Asia in initial teacher education.
- 3.167 Many graduates are entering the teaching profession with minimal preparation and training to deliver Asia-focused content.¹⁴¹ Research from 2011 suggested that less than five per cent of initial teacher education subjects included Asia related content and more recent research indicates that this has not substantially improved.¹⁴²
- 3.168 The delivery of high quality and engaging content relies on teacher confidence. Teachers frequently report a lack of clarity, resources, and preparation to teach Asia-related content in ways that foster authentic regional engagement.¹⁴³
- 3.169 If teachers feel underprepared or unsupported, the implementation of content such as the cross-curriculum priority of 'Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia' can be surface level and patchy at best. At worst, when educators are not adequately trained in teaching concepts such as intercultural understanding, it can lead to unintended reinforcement of stereotypes and negative perceptions.¹⁴⁴
- 3.170 Dr Jennifer Star OAM explained that the lack of appropriate pedagogical guidance and training on how to teach Asia content across learning areas will lead to graduates entering the profession 'without the skills, knowledge, or intercultural mindset needed to prepare their students for Australia's place in the world'.¹⁴⁵
- 3.171 Teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach Asia-focused content also experience difficulties in the classroom and engaging students with Asia amongst a variety of competing interests. Dr Rebecca Cairns and Associate Professor Michiko Weinmann described this issue:

¹⁴¹ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, pp. 5–6; Asialink Education, *Submission 18*, p. 11; Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 116*, p. 5; Dr Jennifer Star OAM, *Submission 13*, p. 8.

¹⁴² Dr Jennifer Star OAM, *Submission 13*, p. 8.

¹⁴³ Dr Jia Ying Neoh, *Submission 163*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ ACSSO, *Submission 10*, pp. 5–6; Associate Professor Ruth Fielding, *Submission 41*, p. 3; Dr Emily Hills and Mrs Janelle Horsington, *Submission 95*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Dr Jennifer Star OAM, *Submission 13*, p. 8.

Teachers state how they must balance their passion for the teaching of Asian histories, cultures, and languages with pragmatism owing to systemic constraints, such as the wash-back effect of high-stakes examinations, ATAR scores, a lack of agency over curriculum planning, and other competing priorities in schools. While teachers with the requisite knowledge, expertise, and interest in Asia-related teaching and learning are key for a sustained enactment of the Asia CCP in a way that engages students, the success of Asia-related education cannot rely on teacher capacity alone.¹⁴⁶

- 3.172 Inquiry participants emphasised that changes must be made to initial teacher education and in service teacher professional development to improve the state of Asia capability education in Australian classrooms.
- 3.173 Many submitters called for Asia related content to be embedded or mandatory within initial teacher training programs and for greater availability of short courses or micro-credentials for in-service teachers.¹⁴⁷
- 3.174 For pre-service teachers this could involve general awareness and foundational knowledge of Asian cultures and languages, alongside intercultural understanding for generalist teachers in early years and for teachers of other learning areas in secondary school. Where content requires specialist knowledge and expertise, such as in the humanities, social sciences and the arts, this could be included in pre-service teacher education.¹⁴⁸
- 3.175 It was also suggested that universities that offer teacher education programs should encourage faculty to design and implement specialised degrees for future primary and secondary teachers of Asian languages and cultures.¹⁴⁹
- 3.176 In the same way that students benefit from in-country immersion programs, teachers also benefit from such experiences, and it was recommended that funding be provided to enable in-country exchanges for teachers across the course of their career.¹⁵⁰
- 3.177 Mr Joel Backwell told the Committee about the positive flow on effects in the classroom for students when teachers undertake immersive experiences:

¹⁴⁶ Dr Rebecca Cairns and Associate Professor Michiko Weinmann, *Submission 162*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Dr Gerhard Hoffstaedter, Professor Antje Missbach and Dr Jemma Purdey, *Submission 101*, p. 6; Dr Jia Ying Neoh, *Submission 163*, p. 1; Dr Gary Bonar, *Submission 166*, p. 4; Dr Emily Hills and Mrs Janelle Horsington, *Submission 95*, p. 4; Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 161.1*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Dr Michelle Kohler, *Submission 116.1*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Lesley Harbon, *Submission 193*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, Alexander Walsh, *Submission 152*, p. 5; APTA, *Submission 58.1*, p. 5; ACSSO, *Submission 10.1*, p. 2; Mr Yahya Zakaria, *Submission 87.1*, p. 3; Dr Emily Hills and Mrs Janelle Horsington, *Submission 95*, p. 5; Victorian Indonesian Language Teachers' Association, *Submission 34*, pp. 6–7.

Equally, it's critical that we get teachers over to Indonesia for immersion as well, to build their confidence and their anecdotes. One of the challenges of language learning is that, if you can't make that language come alive in the classroom, you will lose your students. If the teacher hasn't been there themselves for 20 years, then, if they have any stories, they're outdated. So it's not just about language confidence for teachers; it's about contemporary anecdotes about an Indonesia in 2026 which is tech savvy, exciting, dynamic and youthful.¹⁵¹

- 3.178 Inquiry participants pointed to a previous government initiative—the Endeavour program—which was designed to ensure in-country and immersive experiences for teachers, and in particular language teachers, to support language acquisition and maintenance as well as broader cultural awareness.¹⁵²
- 3.179 For language teachers, the Endeavour Language Fellowship (ELF) provided intensive language teacher training and aimed to build a teacher's proficiency in the language alongside pedagogy and methodology.¹⁵³
- 3.180 In 2015, the federal government provided \$1.2 million in funding for the ELF and supported 68 practicing and pre-service teachers to participate in overseas study programs for Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese.¹⁵⁴
- 3.181 These specific programs no longer exist and there is currently no national level program to support pre-service and in-service teachers gaining immersive experience in Asia. The New Colombo Plan scholarship is eligible to teaching students, but it does not have an education focused stream. The heavily prescribed nature of teacher education currently limits opportunities for overseas study without delaying program completion.

Committee comment

- 3.182 Australia's security and prosperity now rely on the Asia capability of people and institutions, the knowledge, skills and experience needed to be effective in Asia. This vital sovereign capability can only be developed progressively through Australia's education system. The process of building Australia's Asia capability starts at school.
- 3.183 The role of the education system in building Australia's Asia capability has long been recognised and successive governments across all Australian jurisdictions have agreed to prioritise Asia within the primary and secondary school system.

¹⁵¹ Mr Backwell, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 42.

¹⁵² Mrs Farmer, AFMLTA, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 35; Alexander Walsh, *Submission 152*, p. 5; LTAT, *Submission 63*, p. 2.

¹⁵³ LTAT, *Submission 63*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment, Answers to Questions on Notice, Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014-15, DoE ED0680_15/SQ14-003156, p. 2.

- 3.184 Formally, the study of Asia in schools has been given prominence as a cross-curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum. However, this on paper prioritisation does not flow through to implementation in the classroom. Teachers are given little pre-service training on Asia and are offered inconsistent support for translating curriculum recommendations on Asia into classroom teaching. As a result, the translation of what the curriculum says on paper into practice in the classroom depends heavily on the background and interests of individual teachers.
- 3.185 Further impeding the development of Asia capability within the education system is the lack of coordination between schools, particularly in relation to language learning.
- 3.186 Learning a language is a progressive task that takes consistent effort over time. The Australian education system makes this next to impossible for most Australian students. Many inquiry participants told the Committee that there was a limited availability of Asian languages on offer within schools. When Asian languages are offered, a student's ability to progressively learn the same language from primary to secondary school is limited by a lack of coordination between schools.
- 3.187 There is no national level coordination mechanism between primary and secondary schools to ensure the availability and continuity of learning needed for a student to learn an Asian language. The result is a system that discourages both students and teachers and wastes significant public resources in the process.
- 3.188 In the absence of policy focus and coordination, the development of an important sovereign capability is being left to chance. The result is a system that delivers poor student outcomes, discourages both students and language teachers and wastes significant public resources in the process. The current system for teaching Asia and Asian languages in Australian schools is not working for students, teachers or governments.
- 3.189 As a result, the teaching of Asian languages in Australian schools is facing an existential challenge. A vicious cycle has set in. Poorly supported teachers in sub-scale classes create a poor learning experience for students. This causes fewer students enrol in these classes, jeopardising program viability and further deterring future students from choosing these subjects for fear that they will be closed during their course of study. University programs further along the pipeline then confront similar viability challenges creating further uncertainty for students.
- 3.190 Students undertaking teacher education are then deterred from choosing a career teaching Asian languages.
- 3.191 A complex systems problem of this kind will not be solved without national policy leadership and coordination. This must be led by the federal government. The states simply do not share the federal government's interest in building Asia capability as a sovereign capability. Similarly, this agenda cannot be carried by DFAT alone. While the targeted initiatives funded by DFAT to support Australia's Asia capability are invaluable, they cannot match the impact of institutional buy-in across the Australian education system.

- 3.192 An overwhelming message from the evidence received was the need for a nationally coordinated and long-term approach to building Asia capability within the education system. Without national level policy focus on Asia capability within the classroom, the current trajectory of decline will continue, and the education system will fail to produce the sovereign capability the nation demands.

Recommendation 4

- 3.193 The Committee recommends that the Ministers participating in the Education Ministers Meeting establish a working group on building Asia capability in schools to:**

- **Coordinate consistent pathways for the study of priority Asian languages through primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Australia.**
- **Reprioritise and practically support the classroom delivery of the ‘Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia’ cross-curriculum priority in schools.**
- **Monitor and report on the delivery of priority Asian languages in schools through the National Data Framework and Dashboard.**

- 3.194 The current approach to Asian language teaching in Australia is delivering neither breadth of access nor depth in quality of student engagement and learning outcomes. The current approach is not sustainable. If the status quo continues, Asian language learning in Australian schools is on a pathway to extinction.
- 3.195 Past inquiries into Australia’s Asia capability have sought to build this sovereign capability through the promotion of universal access to Asian language learning. These past approaches were not cost-effective and did not deliver a sustainable system underpinned by durable student demand.
- 3.196 A new approach is needed that reflects the fiscal reality of government and the institutional reality of our education system. Instead of aiming for a broad and shallow exposure to Asian language teaching, we should be aiming for a deep and sustainable network of Asian language learning.
- 3.197 As a first step, urgent, targeted intervention is required to put a floor under Asian language programs. The pace that Asian language programs are closing has been accelerating in recent years, particularly for Bahasa Indonesia. Urgent intervention is necessary to ensure that the teaching experience and expertise within existing high-performing Asian language learning programs in Australian schools is not lost to the system forever.
- 3.198 Asia Leader Schools answer two challenges. Australia cannot rebuild Asian language teaching everywhere at once, nor can it afford to allow what is left of our Asian language teaching capability while a long-term strategy is developed.
- 3.199 The Asia Leader School model invests first in schools that have already demonstrated a sustained commitment to a priority Asian language through continuous offerings into the senior years and committed school leadership.

- 3.200 Commonwealth funding would enable schools to demonstrate best practice in Asian language teaching by funding a language and cultural studies administrator, in-country professional learning for language teachers and school leadership, a background language assistant, and in-country immersion for students. In return, the school would need to demonstrate sustained or improved enrolments over the medium term, act as hub for professional development and mentoring language teachers at other schools and host regional immersion events for their Asian language.
- 3.201 In the short term, the Asia Leader School Model puts a floor under the system's best remaining programs at exactly the moment they are being lost. Over the medium term, these schools become the proving ground for the pedagogy that creates genuine student demand and exemplars through their regional school network. Over the long term, each school could anchor a regional network of schools offering the teaching of their Asian language. As an end state, the Committee envisages an Asia Leader School for each priority language in every capital city, acting as the hub through which curriculum, teaching practice, language assistants and in-country partnerships flow to the schools of its surrounding region.
- 3.202 The Asia Leader Schools would be further expected to establish relationships with local universities offering further study in their chosen language, offering opportunities for senior school students to study for university credit and exposing students to the future pathways available to them should they continue their studies.
- 3.203 The crisis facing Indonesian teaching in Australian schools is particularly acute and demands its own urgent intervention. Queensland's last senior secondary programs are closing now, and the witnesses closest to the system told the Committee that the most urgent priority for preventing the functional extinction of Indonesian language teaching is retaining the current teaching workforce. The best way to do this is by direct intervention to support the teachers' associations that support these teachers.

Recommendation 5

- 3.204 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in collaboration with the states and territories, establish a new program of Asia Leader Schools for priority languages.**

These schools would act as a hub of best-practice for language education for schools in their region and build ties with nearby universities to improve education pathways for students.

- 3.205 The Committee agrees with the need for urgency for action to save Indonesian language in Australian schools. The fastest and most impactful intervention point for preserving the Indonesian language programs currently operating in Australian schools is to better support the organisations that support the teachers delivering them. This should be an urgent priority for government.

Recommendation 6

3.206 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government treat an urgent Indonesian language schools intervention package as a first-order priority, with elements sequenced as follows:

- **as the first element, funding for one full-time position in each state and territory Indonesian language teacher professional association, to reduce the administrative load carried by volunteers, coordinate mentoring of early-career and pre-service teachers, and provide early warning of program closures and teacher supply risk**
- **designation of the first tranche of Asia Leader Schools for Indonesian, prioritising schools with demonstrated, sustained senior secondary provision**
- **a one-off investment in contemporary Years 3 to 12 Indonesian curriculum resources, developed jointly with the Indonesian Government where possible**
- **expanded bilateral cooperation with Indonesia on teacher supply, including national extension of the Western Australian language assistant model and a review of visa settings for language teaching assistants.**

3.207 In-country experience is transformative for language learning and the development of Asia capability. Students who participate in exchanges or immersion programs develop not only language proficiency but also cultural understanding, confidence, and personal connections that can shape career choices and lifelong engagement in the region. The Committee has consistently heard that well-timed in-country experience in high school can spark a lifelong passion for learning about the region.

3.208 Despite these benefits, Australian schools face significant barriers in organising overseas travel for students. Individual schools must independently identify partner schools, navigate visa requirements, secure appropriate insurance, and develop risk management frameworks and in-country logistics, often without the support of specialist expertise.

3.209 An overarching body, with specialist expertise and dedicated program staff to support high school students undertaking overseas travel, would reduce the barriers that are faced by school communities in arranging these life-changing experiences and increase the number of opportunities offered to students.

3.210 Consideration should be given to the structure and governance of the Australian Schools in Asia (ASIA) Consortium. As general principles, the ASIA Consortium should:

- Operate as a single consortium with dedicated country program managers and in-country coordinators for each destination.
- Be hosted by an established institution with relevant expertise.

- Include state and territory education department representation in governance to facilitate alignment with departmental travel policies and duty of care requirements.
- Maintain in-country presence to support program delivery and emergency response.

Recommendation 7

3.211 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish an Australian Schools in Asia (ASIA) Consortium.

The ASIA Consortium would provide Australian schools access to a ready built infrastructure for school-level in-country experiences, ensure program quality and student safety across jurisdictions, and reduce administrative burden for schools and teachers.

The functions of the ASIA Consortium should include responsibility for:

- **Identifying, vetting, and maintaining relationships with partner schools and ensuring partners meet Australian expectations for student safety, educational quality, and cultural exchange.**
- **Developing standardised program models aligned with Australian Curriculum requirements.**
- **Organising travel logistics such as group insurance arrangements, visa coordination, transfers, accommodation and other logistical and administrative support.**
- **Delivering pre-departure preparation for teachers and students.**
- **Maintaining 24/7 emergency response capability and crisis management protocols.**

3.212 Students feel significant pressure about selecting the best choice of subjects to maximise their ATAR and prospects for university admissions. Young people are deterred from studying Asian language due to perceptions of its difficulty and impacts on their prospects for university admission. ATAR bonus points could be a positive reinforcing signal on the value of learning an Asian language in senior secondary school.

3.213 Students and their families need to see the value of Asia studies, know about the future opportunities it can bring, and be confident that undertaking Asian language study will not negatively impact their university admission score.

3.214 Students and their families are also incentivised by university recognition of secondary school subjects. Students are more likely to see the value of studying an Asian language through to Year 12 if there is tertiary recognition and credit pathways for secondary school study of Asian languages. This would also shore up a pipeline of secondary school students to advanced university study.

Recommendation 8

- 3.215 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments, tertiary admission centres and universities to implement a nationally consistent five–point ATAR bonus for students who complete a priority Asian language in Year 12.**

The bonus should operate within the existing differentiated language streams (first language, background language and second language) so that it rewards genuine language acquisition across all learner backgrounds, and its design should draw on the experience of the Victorian LOTE bonus scheme.

Recommendation 9

- 3.216 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government collaborates with the relevant state and territory university admissions bodies and universities to design and establish credit pathways to university for students completing a priority Asian language in Year 12.**

- 3.217 The Committee acknowledges the unique situation of Mandarin Chinese language learning. Bilingual education has an important role in supporting the development and proficiency in language acquisition. It is, however greatly, concerned that the options for continuing Chinese language study are severely limited.

- 3.218 Continuous study is incredibly important for students to achieve proficiency and to advance their language skills. Currently students do not have this option and when Chinese language is offered it does not cater to the diversity of student need. Students who have more advanced language skills are deterred from taking language study in high school as they often can only access beginner level classes.

Recommendation 10

- 3.219 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in collaboration with state and territory governments, work towards the availability of a bilingual Mandarin Chinese education at the secondary school level in catchment areas where there is a bilingual Mandarin Chinese primary school.**

- 3.220 While South Asian languages are some of the most widely spoken community languages in the country, opportunities for students to study these languages in mainstream schools have remained limited. There is growing interest in second generation diaspora communities to study South Asian languages at schools, which is currently unmet.

- 3.221 This challenge can be addressed through targeted professional learning for teachers who possess South Asian language capability.

Recommendation 11

- 3.222 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in coordination with state and territory governments, support programs for existing teachers and educators who already possess South Asian language capability to acquire the skills needed to teach these languages at Australian schools.**
- 3.223 Australia's Asia capabilities are at risk due to teacher workforce shortages. The Committee acknowledges that Australia is facing a teacher workforce shortage and that improving teacher supply has been identified as a priority area in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan includes a range of programs designed to incentivise people to take up teaching and for high achieving professionals to pursue a career change into education.
- 3.224 The teacher workforce shortage is particularly pronounced for the case of Asian language teachers and further efforts are needed to incentivise Asian language and Asian studies experts into the teaching profession.
- 3.225 The pre-existing programs to improve teacher supply are having a positive impact on increasing the number of students in initial teacher education and can be utilised to create a pathway for Asian language and Asian studies experts into the field of education.
- 3.226 The teaching profession has also been recognised as an in-demand skill in Australia's immigration program. Barriers exist within the current registration requirements in relation to English language proficiency for overseas trained teachers. Language teaching assistants are also not recognised as an in-demand skill for visa purposes.
- 3.227 In a time of language teacher shortages, these barriers reduce the availability of people who are qualified and able to teach in Australian schools. Consideration needs to be given to how skilled visas are working for the education system and the exceptionally high English language requirements placed on overseas trained teachers in comparison to other professionals.

Recommendation 12

- 3.228 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government designate places in the Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships and High Achieving Teachers Program to individuals with a specialisation in a priority Asian languages and/or Asian studies.**

Recommendation 13

- 3.229 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review skilled visa requirements for the teaching profession and language teacher aides and work with the relevant state and territory counterparts to examine the English proficiency requirements for overseas trained teachers.**
- 3.230 Preparing future teachers to be classroom ready is a critical component of initial teacher education. Pre-service teachers need to be exposed to and experience the content they will be expected to deliver from the curriculum.
- 3.231 When teachers do not feel confident in the subject matter and expectations of teaching are unclear, the learning experience suffers.
- 3.232 The Committee was surprised to learn that many future teachers have minimal exposure to the study of Asia in their education degrees. From the evidence provided to the Committee, it does not appear that there is a requirement for pre-service teachers to study Asia even though it is one of three cross-curriculum priorities.
- 3.233 This places an unfair expectation of future teachers to deliver content in a field that they may have not ever studied. There should be an assessment of the teaching accreditation requirements process which aligns with the Australian Curriculum to ensure that future teachers are well trained and supported to deliver the content and objectives as outlined by the curriculum.
- 3.234 The programs previously in place to support pre-service and in-service teachers develop and strengthen their skills no longer exist and this had a detrimental impact on the training of Asia specialist teachers. Utilising current programs, such as the New Colombo Plan, and establishing new dedicated scholarships to support Asian language teachers are essential to building the capability needed within the teaching profession.

Recommendation 14

- 3.235 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government collaborates with the relevant state and territory teacher accreditation and registration bodies, including the Australian Institute for Teaching and School and Leadership, to assess the level of Asia-focused content in teaching degrees and consider mandatory minimum levels of Asian content in teacher education programs.**

Recommendation 15

- 3.236 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establishes an Asian Language Intensive Program to enable pre-service and current teachers to develop specialisation in an Asian language.**

Recommendation 16

- 3.237 The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade establish an education stream and introduce an education fellow within the New Colombo Plan program.**
- 3.238 Asian language teaching in Australian schools only survives through the extraordinary efforts of passionate and committed teachers. But the work these teachers do is difficult and professionally isolating.
- 3.239 Asian language teachers reported poor working conditions, isolation, limited career prospects and undervaluing of their expertise and subject.
- 3.240 Teachers need appropriate resources, access to networks and mentoring, and professional recognition. They also need peer support. Without this, we will continue to see Asian language teachers burn out, and school programs close soon after.
- 3.241 The Committee heard about the important role of professional teacher association and networks. These bodies are often staffed by busy teachers volunteering their time and resources to support one another. This approach is not sustainable without consistent levels of funding and resources.
- 3.242 Small amounts of government funding to Asian teachers' associations would have a disproportionate impact on stopping the bleeding of Asian language teachers leaving the profession.

Recommendation 17

- 3.243 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provides funding to professional teaching associations and networks to support the initial and ongoing professional development of Asia capable teachers.**

This should include funding for:

- **Permanent staff of teaching associations and networks.**
 - **Support to establish a national network of expert mentors for pre-service and in-service teachers.**
 - **The development of curriculum resources.**
- 3.244 While Artificial Intelligence cannot replace the need for Australians to speak priority Asian languages, it can be a useful tool for learning another language.

Recommendation 18

- 3.245 The Committee recommends that the Department of Education, through Education Services Australia, evaluate and develop guidance on AI-assisted language learning tools, building on the ELLA platform.**



4. A diminishing pipeline to tertiary education

- 4.1 Universities play an important dual role in Australia's sovereign Asia capability. As teaching institutions, our universities train the next generation of Asia experts. Australian universities undergraduate language and area studies programs give Australian graduates the skills and knowledge they need to be Asia capable. As research institutions, Australian universities also allow academics to generate new and rich knowledge about Asia that is of vital importance to Australian governments and civil society. Unfortunately, the role that both the teaching and research functions of Australia's universities plays in building Australia's Asia capability is under serious pressure.
- 4.2 The pipeline between schooling, undergraduate, and postgraduate study has fractured. Area studies courses are diminishing across the sector in favour of generalist degree structures. Deep academic expertise in Asia is declining. There has been minimal national leadership to set out a strategy for retaining Asia capability within the university sector to train future generations.
- 4.3 These factors have combined to push the study of Asian languages and cultures at universities across Australia 'to a breaking point'.¹
- 4.4 This chapter discusses the current state of the university sector in developing Asia capable university graduates and delivering Asia focused education. It covers the following issues:
- language acquisition through university study
 - the decline in specialist Asian Studies knowledge across all levels of the university sector, from undergraduate to postgraduate and academic expertise
 - ways to incentivise university student engagement with Asia, and
 - the need for greater oversight and leadership across the sector.

¹ Professor Kate Darian-Smith, President, Australian Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA), *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 2.

Asian language capability: diminishing demand and shrinking supply

- 4.5 There is no clear pipeline from primary and secondary school language learning through to tertiary education. Inconsistent offerings between primary, secondary, and tertiary education discourage long-term commitment to language study.²
- 4.6 The lack of clear pathways from upper secondary school language learning into undergraduate university programs has impacts for both the demand and supply of language courses across the tertiary education sector.
- 4.7 The relationship between student demand for Asian language courses and what universities can realistically supply is a quagmire. As demand weakens, courses become less viable for universities to run, and this often leads to program restrictions or closures. This has a compounding effect of further restricting the pathway for students wishing to develop and advance their Asian language skills at university.
- 4.8 Even when there is demand for the courses, universities face perverse financial incentives to close language programs.

Demand challenges: declining enrolments

- 4.9 Enrolment in Asian languages at the tertiary education level is at a 'historic low'.³ According to the University of Queensland (UQ), only 1 per cent of domestic students were studying an Asian language in 2023.⁴
- 4.10 Enrolments in Asian languages at universities have been in decline since 2016. In 2016, subject enrolments for Eastern Asian, Southeast Asian, and Southern Asian languages had an equivalent full-time study load (EFTSL) of 3,383. In 2024, that EFTSL figure was 1,931.⁵
- 4.11 The Committee heard from several universities about their experiences with declining enrolments across a breadth of languages. For example, of the 16 Asian languages taught at the Australian National University (ANU), almost all have experienced significant falls in enrolments since 2020. The drop is between 50 and 60 per cent in the university's major languages, including Chinese and Japanese.⁶

² See, for example, University of Tasmania, *Submission 42*, p. 4; Australasian College of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), *Submission 43*, p. 2; Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH), *Submission 64*, p. 8; International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), *Submission 111*, p. 7.

³ Mr Philip Ivanov, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

⁴ The University of Queensland (UQ), *Submission 138*, p. 2.

⁵ Department of Education (DoE), *Submission 191.1*, pp. 13–14.

⁶ Dr Elly Kent, Deputy Director, Languages, School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University (ANU CAP), *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 19.

- 4.12 The declining enrolments in Asian languages at university is a direct result of the declining rates of Asian language study in Year 12.⁷
- 4.13 The International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) explained that ‘structural issues regarding Australian university students’ uptake of Asian languages and Asian studies stems from school education.’⁸
- 4.14 Students entering the university sector have often decided whether to include a language as part of their study prior to their admission.⁹ Choices and influences in the final years of schooling can therefore significantly impact the demand for language courses at the university level.¹⁰
- 4.15 The disrupted pipeline between high school and university has also led to uneven enrolment patterns between beginner and advanced courses. This has contributed to a general trend of attrition in language programs, with declining enrolments between beginner, intermediate, advanced, and postgraduate classes.¹¹
- 4.16 As explained by the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, the data on the decline in Year 12 enrolments (for Indonesian) and enrolments at the tertiary level ‘shows a really strong correlation between the depth of student achievement and the availability of high school programs’.¹²
- 4.17 Beginner enrolments in Indonesian across UQ, Griffith University, and Queensland University of Technology increased modestly between 2018 and 2025. However, similar growth has not been seen across intermediate and advanced level courses. In 2025, six students were enrolled in beginner courses, three in intermediate subjects, four in advanced courses, and one in Honours study in Indonesian.¹³
- 4.18 Similarly, at the ANU, in 2000, enrolments in advanced Indonesian language courses were nearly double the number of enrolments in beginner language courses. That ratio is now inverted.¹⁴ This attrition was directly related back to lower numbers of students enrolling in language subjects at university following study through high school:

⁷ See, for example, Dr Allan Patience, *Submission 4*, p. 6; ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 5; DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 4; Monash University, *Submission 173*, p. 2.

⁸ IEAA, *Submission 111*, p. 7.

⁹ ANU College of Asia and the Pacific (ANU CAP), *Submission 32*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Dr Allan Patience, *Submission 4*, p. 6.

¹¹ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 4.

¹² Dr Kent, ANU CAP, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 19.

¹³ Dr Allan Patience, *Submission 4*, p. 6; Dr Zane Goebel, *Submission 11*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Dr Kent, ANU CAP, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 19.

More students used to arrive at uni[versity] with strong foundations and then were able to begin their tertiary study at higher levels and go onto stronger proficiency and, from there, go to higher-degree research or significant positions in government and the private sector in bilateral and multilateral relations. Others trained as teachers, perpetuating the supply of high-quality Asian language teachers in Australia. That pipeline is now broken.¹⁵

- 4.19 Without strong foundations underlying their entry into tertiary level language learning, 'developing first competence, and then fluency, in an Asian language is increasingly seen as burdensome, complex, demanding, and "hard"'.¹⁶
- 4.20 Currently, universities do not have a clear way to incentivise students to prioritise learning an Asian language. Instead, student choice appears to be driven primarily by individual student interest and previous exposure to particular languages and cultures.¹⁷
- 4.21 Without ways to encourage students to begin their language journey upon entering university, the sector is reliant on a crumbling pipeline between secondary school and tertiary education to drive student demand. As articulated by the University of Tasmania, this lack of a clear pipeline with consistent language offerings 'discourages long-term language commitment and erodes the pipeline of qualified learners'.¹⁸

Supply challenges: threatened availability and program closure

- 4.22 The success and availability of supply of Asian language courses at university are dependent on demand, notably the Year 12 graduates entering the university sector. This declining demand has contributed to the closure of language programs across the university sector.¹⁹
- 4.23 Of the 36 public universities in Australia, only 26 offer language courses at the bachelor level.²⁰ Several universities no longer offer any language courses, and the footprint of languages in the universities still able to support them has shrunk significantly.²¹

¹⁵ Dr Kent, ANU CAP, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 19.

¹⁶ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 6.

¹⁷ Professor Michael Wesley, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global Culture and Engagement, University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 12.

¹⁸ University of Tasmania, *Submission 42*, p. 4.

¹⁹ See, for example, Ms Hingor Chung, *Submission 14*, p. 3; DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 4; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 49*, p. 1; Universities Australia, *Submission 71*, p. 3; Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA), *Submission 72*, p. 3; Monash University, *Submission 173*, p. 2.

²⁰ DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 4.

²¹ See, for example, University of Tasmania, *Submission 42*, p. 2; Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson and Dr Elly Kent, *Submission 135*, pp. 1–3; UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 2–3.

- 4.24 As noted by UQ, in 1997, 66 languages were offered at Australian universities. By 2007, this number had dropped to 29 and has continued to decrease in the years since.²²
- 4.25 According to the Australasian College of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), as of 2025 Australian universities only teach a total of 14 Asia-Pacific languages, including Turkish. Table 4.1 shows the breakdown of the Asia-Pacific languages currently offered by Australian public universities.

Table 4.1 Prevalence of Asia-Pacific languages in Australian public universities

Language	Number of universities offering courses
Burmese	1
Cantonese	1
Chinese (Mandarin)	22
Hindi	2
Indonesian	13
Korean	8
Japanese	21
Mongolian	1
Tetum (Timor-Leste)	1
Thai	1
Tibetan	2
Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea)	1
Turkish	1
Vietnamese	1

Source: Adapted from DASSH, Submission 43, p. 7

- 4.26 The decrease in language programs has occurred across languages and institutions. However, the impact of these closures has been felt more strongly on some languages than others.
- 4.27 Several Asian languages have disappeared entirely from the university sector, including Cambodian, Javanese, Sundanese, Filipino, and Urdu.²³ Others are close to extinction; 10 of the 14 Asia-Pacific languages still offered by Australian universities are taught in only one or two universities.²⁴

²² UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 2.

²³ ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 3.

²⁴ DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 7.

- 4.28 Vietnamese and Thai, for example, are only available at the ANU. Hindi is only taught at the ANU and La Trobe University.²⁵
- 4.29 As Professor Michele Ford explained, when language courses are only available at one or two institutions, they become inaccessible to the majority of students. This loss of access is difficult to reverse or remedy.²⁶
- 4.30 This inaccessibility is exacerbated by the relative immobility of Australian students. The South Asian Studies Association of Australia (SASAA) noted that Australia lacks a culture of student mobility at university; Australian students expect to be able to study in their hometown or in the nearest university to their hometown.²⁷
- 4.31 As language programs close, particularly for less-common language offerings, the ability for students to access these courses becomes increasingly limited. For example, students outside of Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory are unable to study Hindi in person as part of their degree. Students wanting to study Vietnamese or Thai must relocate to Canberra and achieve the ATAR (Australian Tertiary Admission Rank) required to enrol at the ANU.²⁸
- 4.32 This is particularly concerning for students in regional areas. Both the University of Southern Queensland and the University of Wollongong have disestablished their entire language departments, limiting access to language courses for students based in regional Queensland and New South Wales. The proposed closure of Indonesian at the University of Tasmania would remove the only opportunity for Tasmanian students to study the language at a tertiary level.²⁹
- 4.33 Even more commonly taught languages have been impacted by program closures, particularly outside of inner-city or Group of Eight universities.
- 4.34 Indonesian was frequently raised as a case study for the effects of low student demand and program closures on language availability in the tertiary sector.³⁰ In 1992, 22 tertiary programs in Indonesian were offered across the university sector. As of 2025, 13 universities still offer some Indonesian teaching, and as few as 10 sustain a full program.³¹
- 4.35 Several of these program closures have occurred in the past decade, and courses continue to be at risk. Curtin University closed its Indonesian language program a decade ago, while the University of Tasmania's Indonesian program relies on funding arrangements 'that cannot be sustained long term'.³²

²⁵ Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 1.

²⁶ Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 1.

²⁷ Dr Adam Bowles, President, South Asian Studies Association of Australia (SASAA), *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 4.

²⁸ Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 4.

²⁹ DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 4.

³⁰ See for example, Curtin University, *Submission 22*, p. 2; University of Tasmania, *Submission 42*, p. 2; Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson and Dr Elly Kent, *Submission 135*, p. 3.

³¹ Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson and Dr Elly Kent, *Submission 135*, p. 3.

³² Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson and Dr Elly Kent, *Submission 135*, p. 3.

- 4.36 Chinese (Mandarin) and Japanese language courses have also faced closures in recent years. The University of Canberra recently closed its Japanese and Chinese language programs.³³ Swinburne University has also ceased offering Chinese language courses.³⁴ The closure of the University of Wollongong's language program included disestablishing Chinese (Mandarin) and Japanese courses.³⁵
- 4.37 Limited and inconsistent student demand makes the provision of language courses financially challenging for many universities.³⁶
- 4.38 According to Universities Australia, the average class cohort for Asian language courses is between two and 38 students. They argue that 'the variability of these small-scale programs makes some courses financially unsustainable, restricting universities' capacity to further develop Asia capability'.³⁷
- 4.39 In many cases, university language course offerings are financially viable due to the demand from international students' enrolments rather than domestic students.³⁸

Financial disincentives for students and universities

- 4.40 Issues were raised regarding the financial disincentives in the tertiary education system for both student enrolment in language courses and the cost of delivery for a university. Three features of the funding system combine to produce this result.
- 4.41 First, the structure of the Commonwealth funding arrangements for course fees, notably the Job-Ready Graduates Package (JRGP), was raised as a financial disincentive to students to study Asia and its languages.³⁹
- 4.42 Under JRGP the student contribution was lowered for subjects recognised as national priority areas, including for foreign language courses.⁴⁰ The maximum student contribution amount per language course was reduced from \$6,804 to \$3,950.⁴¹

³³ Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU), *Submission 80*, p. 3.

³⁴ LCNAU, *Submission 80*, p. 3.

³⁵ DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 4.

³⁶ See, for example, Professor Melissa Crouch, *Submission 60*, p. 2; Universities Australia, *Submission 71*, p. 3.

³⁷ Universities Australia, *Submission 71*, p. 3.

³⁸ See, for example, Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 1; The University of Sydney, *Submission 171*, p. 9; Monash University, *Submission 173*, p. 1.

³⁹ See, for example, Group of Eight (Go8), *Submission 36*, pp. 2–3; DASSH, *Submission 43*, pp. 4–6; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 8; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 1; LCNAU, *Submission 80*, p. 4; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, pp. 9–10; UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 3; Monash University, *Submission 173*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ DoE, Improving accountability and information for providers, <https://www.education.gov.au/job-ready/improving-accountability-information-providers> (accessed 17 April 2026).

⁴¹ DoE, Improving accountability and information for providers, <https://www.education.gov.au/job-ready/improving-accountability-information-providers> (accessed 17 April 2026).

- 4.43 At the same time, the student contribution for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) degrees increased substantially. The maximum student contribution for humanities, society and culture courses was increased to \$14,500, up from \$6,804 prior to the introduction of JRGP.⁴²
- 4.44 As a result, while the cost of language subjects were reduced under JRGP, the costs of the HASS subjects that often sparked student interest in language study and funnelled them into language subjects were significantly increased.
- 4.45 While the language subjects may be cheaper for students, the overall cost of HASS degrees may mean that students do not actually experience the financial savings. Instead, JRGP has led to ‘a real, as well as a perceived, financial disadvantage for any student thinking about studying in this area’.⁴³
- 4.46 Additionally, the JRGP prioritisation structure does not place equal value on language and cultural competency. Instead, according to the Australian Academy of Humanities (AAH), it simultaneously ‘rewards’ language learning while penalising students ‘studying culture, history, society, or politics courses’.⁴⁴
- 4.47 As the University of Melbourne’s submission explained:
- ...students pay more to study subjects on Asian cultures and societies than Asian language subjects, creating a financial incentive for them to only study the latter rather than both together. This potentially undermines the quality of their Asia-related education given the intimate links between language and culture/society.⁴⁵
- 4.48 Although an unintended impact of degree cost changes, JRGP may have ‘sent a policy signal that understanding Asia’ societies, cultures and politics is not valued’.⁴⁶ Despite the policy intentions, JRGP has not resulted in more students studying foreign languages, including Asian languages.⁴⁷
- 4.49 Second, the JRGP reshaped the price universities receive for languages without changing what they cost to deliver. From the university side, there are real financial disincentives within the system. Teaching foreign languages is a costly endeavour for universities. From the University perspective, foreign languages courses have experienced the second largest annual cost increase of 6.2 per cent from 2019 to 2020.⁴⁸

⁴² DoE, Improving accountability and information for providers, <https://www.education.gov.au/job-ready/improving-accountability-information-providers> (accessed 17 April 2026).

⁴³ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p 10; UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 3; Monash University, *Submission 173*, p .3.

⁴⁴ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ University of Melbourne, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Dr Jessica Hartmann, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Assurance Branch, DoE, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Universities Australia, *Submission 71*, p. 3.

- 4.50 The JRGP package lowered the student contribution for languages and raised the Commonwealth contribution to compensate. The University of Melbourne explained the effect this had on institutional behaviour:

Somewhat counterintuitively the reduced student contribution and corresponding increased Commonwealth contribution for languages courses under JRGP also has the potential to generate perverse outcomes for the study of languages...

The intention of the JRGP was to incentivise students to take up languages by reducing the cost to them. But for universities it creates an incentive not to offer more language places, but to offer places in other courses/subjects where the Commonwealth contribution is lower, as it is possible to enrol more EFTSL from these courses/subjects, with the same MBGA.⁴⁹

- 4.51 Third, the Maximum Basic Grant Amount, the cap on each university's total Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding, turns that distortion into an incentive to close programs. Because the Commonwealth share of language funding is unusually high, language enrolments use up a university's funding cap faster than enrolments in subjects where the Commonwealth share is lower. Once a university reaches its cap, it receives only the student contribution for any further enrolment.

- 4.52 For Asian languages, the University of Melbourne calculated that this means recovering roughly \$4,600 per equivalent full-time student against a total resourcing cost of about \$23,669. That is around a 20 per cent cost recovery.⁵⁰

- 4.53 A university at or near its cap therefore has a direct financial reason to allocate its places to cheaper subjects and to close languages, even though many students wish to study them.

- 4.54 In exploring the incentives faced by universities, Professor Michele Ford told the Committee:

...tiny classes do not generate tuition revenue sufficient to maintain programs even in major metropolitan universities, and market logic ensures these smaller programs will continue closing unless the Government intervenes.⁵¹

- 4.55 The Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) discussed the funding dynamic and how this creates different incentives and shapes decision making by universities and said that:

...for those universities that are overenrolled, that are taking students beyond their funding envelope, there are incentives effectively built into the system for them to teach courses that are financially beneficial for them. That's exactly one of the problems that the ATEC was established to help address.⁵²

⁴⁹ University of Melbourne, Submission 90, p. 10.

⁵⁰ University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 10.

⁵¹ Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, pp. 1–2.

⁵² Mr David Turvey, Executive Director, Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC), *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 4.

- 4.56 The policy intention of financial arrangements of universities, particularly the JRGP program has clearly not produced its intended results. More students are not studying Asian languages since its introduction and perversely, the financial incentives for universities to offer these courses have diminished.

Nationally Strategic Language protections

- 4.57 Previously, the Commonwealth Government protected what it designated as 'Nationally Strategic Languages' in the tertiary education systems. Funding agreements between the Commonwealth and a university under the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding required universities to obtain the Commonwealth government's approval prior to closing courses in a Nationally Strategic Language.⁵³
- 4.58 Several Asian languages were included in this designation: Indonesian (from 2009), Chinese (from 2014), Hindi (from 2014), Japanese (from 2014), and Korean (from 2014).⁵⁴
- 4.59 In 2021, the CGS Funding Agreements were updated. This included broadening the course closure approval provisions to reflect priority disciplines. While 'languages' were still broadly listed as a priority discipline, the revised provisions did not provide protection for Nationally Strategic Languages.⁵⁵
- 4.60 In 2024, the CGS Funding Agreements were further revised. These revisions included removing the requirement for prior Commonwealth approval for course closures, and the removal of languages as an area of priority for the higher education sector.⁵⁶
- 4.61 There was discussion regarding the role of this mechanism in signalling the importance of Asian languages to students and whether it was an effective mechanism in increasing enrolments.
- 4.62 The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) noted that the removal of these provisions 'seemed to be part of a signalling that perhaps those languages [were] no longer as important'.⁵⁷
- 4.63 The Department of Education (DoE) stated that 'subject enrolments in Asian languages were declining before the removal of Nationally Strategic Language provisions'.⁵⁸

⁵³ DoE, *Submission 191.2*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ DoE, *Submission 191.2*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ DoE, *Submission 191.2*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ DoE, *Submission 191.2*, p. 9.

⁵⁷ Professor Kate McGregor, Fellow, ASSA, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 4.

⁵⁸ DoE, *Submission 191.2*, p. 9.

- 4.64 Both ASSA and AAH recommended the reintroduction of protections or provisions for nationally strategic Asian languages as a policy mechanism to prevent or limit the closure of these languages across Australian universities.⁵⁹
- 4.65 Currently, there are no legislative provisions that would allow DoE discretionary power to compel universities to offer certain courses or intervene in operational decisions.⁶⁰

Collaborative language delivery as a model to overcome barriers

- 4.66 Cross-institutional study was identified as a way to facilitate student engagement with language programs even when courses are no longer offered by their home universities.⁶¹ Cross-institutional study enables students to undertake a course or courses at a university other than their home institution, and later receive credit towards their degree for this study.
- 4.67 A common mechanism for achieving this is through online or distance learning. Curtin University, for example, allows students to enrol in Asian languages through Open Universities Australia. Students can take language subjects as electives or as a part of a double major within their degree program.⁶²
- 4.68 Submissions also noted hub and spoke models of collaborative language delivery between institutions. These arrangements formalise cross-institutional study as a relatively accessible option for students, enabling students within a specific geographic area to access a wider range of language programs than offered solely at their home institution.⁶³
- 4.69 In particular, evidence focused on two collaborative delivery arrangements: the Brisbane Universities Language Alliance (BULA) and the partnership between the University of Adelaide (now Adelaide University) and Flinders University.
- 4.70 Established in 2009, BULA is a collaborative initiative that pools the teaching of nine languages across south-east Queensland's three primary universities: UQ, Queensland University of Technology, and Griffith University.⁶⁴

Through the Alliance, students from each of the universities are able to study Chinese (UQ or Griffith University), Japanese (UQ or Griffith University), Korean (UQ), or Indonesian (UQ) through a facilitated cross-institutional enrolment process.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ AAH, *Submission 61.1*, pp. 6–7; AAH, *Submission 61.4*, p. 5; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 1.

⁶⁰ DoE, *Submission 191.1*, p. 31.

⁶¹ See, for example, Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 3; DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 3; UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 4.

⁶² DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 3. See also, Korean Studies Association of Australia, *Submission 154*, p. 2.

⁶³ See, for example: Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 3; UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 4; The University of Sydney, *Submission 171*, p. 6; Professor Greg Hainge, Head of School, School of Languages and Cultures, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, pp. 12, 16; Professor Michele Ford, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 23.

⁶⁴ UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 4; Professor Hainge, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 12.

⁶⁵ UQ, *Submission 138*, p. 4.

- 4.71 The Adelaide University/Flinders University partnership operates in a similar manner, allowing students to study Indonesian (operated by Flinders University), Chinese (Adelaide University), and Japanese (Adelaide University) through a facilitated cross-institutional enrolment process.⁶⁶
- 4.72 Hub and spoke models of language delivery can offer real benefits to students who would otherwise be unable to access language programs through their home university. However, there are barriers to successful implementation and as Professor Ford noted, ‘the thing about hub and spoke models is it can’t just be a bandaid to try to keep availability; it actually has to be a proactive approach’.⁶⁷
- 4.73 Several witnesses noted substantial challenges with current hub and spoke models of language delivery, such as credit pathways between universities, timetabling, and other administrative issues.⁶⁸
- 4.74 While these models are beneficial for students, the structure of the tertiary education system creates barriers from the university side. For example, staff at hub universities often have substantial workload pressures, spoke universities have little incentives to market cross institutional study as this can lead to loss of funding, and the competitive nature of the system can lead to difficulties around which university ‘holds’ the CSP.⁶⁹
- 4.75 AAH also pointed out significant challenges in introducing a hub and spoke model approach to language learning. They noted that universities are not incentivised to build collaborative and cross-institutional language teaching programs. Hub universities are not incentivised to prioritise students from other universities, and spoke universities are not incentivised to surrender enrolments to allow for cross-institutional study.⁷⁰
- 4.76 AAH also noted other issues with current hub and spoke structures. Online or cross-campus delivery for students from spoke institutions may exacerbate attrition issues. Current language-focused models lack complementary area studies content. Existing models do not address student demand pipeline issues. Perhaps most significantly, a hub and spoke models risks entrenching a hierarchy of capability within institutions, where regional and outer-metro universities become permanently dependent on inner-metro universities with the capacity to offer language programs.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Professor Ford, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 23.

⁶⁸ Professor Melissa Crouch, *Submission 60*, p. 3; Dr Zane Goebel, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Professor Ford, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 23; Professor Hainge, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 12; Ms Kirsten Andrews, Vice-President, External Engagement, The University of Sydney, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 17.

⁷⁰ AAH, *Submission 64.1*, p. 4.

⁷¹ AAH, *Submission 64.1*, pp. 4-6.

- 4.77 According to Professor Ford, a robust hub and spoke model would require incentives for and support from both hub and spoke institutions. She suggested a system where spoke universities ‘were encouraged to have a big enough cohort that they could run a classroom with a local tutor’.⁷²
- 4.78 This structure would mitigate some of the logistical challenges facing students from spoke institutions, while also relieving workload pressure on teaching staff from hub institutions. It would also retain a level of capability at spoke institutions, thus limiting the risk of a hierarchical structure between hub and spoke capabilities emerging.
- 4.79 While not without their challenges, submissions and witnesses noted that hub and spoke models with targeted funding and policy structures to encourage genuine cross-institutional collaboration and capacity development provide an opportunity to reinvigorate Asian language teaching across the university sector.⁷³

The decline of specialisation

- 4.80 An understanding of Asian knowledges, cultures, histories, and politics, alongside language proficiency, is important to ensure true Asia capability.⁷⁴ The university sector is experiencing a shift in the knowledge and type of capability it is producing among graduates.
- 4.81 Areas of study such as international relations, economics, business, and media studies have more Asia content than they did 25 years ago. However, specialist programs in Asian area studies have declined in recent years, both in terms of courses offered and enrolment numbers.⁷⁵ For example, the ANU’s Bachelor of Asian Studies has experienced a 70 per cent decrease in enrolments since 2020.⁷⁶
- 4.82 According to AAH, 13 Australian universities offered undergraduate subjects on South Asia in the 1970s. Today, only five offer semester-length subjects on South Asia, and only the ANU offers a dedicated South Asian Studies program.⁷⁷
- 4.83 The SASAA noted that the University of Adelaide (now Adelaide University) no longer offers Asian Studies programs, with courses discontinued and research centres closed. They highlighted that ‘this is not a situation that’s unique to [this] university; it’s a pattern that has been repeated in universities across Australia’.⁷⁸

⁷² Professor Ford, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 23.

⁷³ See, for example: Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, pp. 5–6; The University of Sydney, *Submission 171*, p. 6; Professor Hainge, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, pp. 12; 17.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 3; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 1; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 4.

⁷⁵ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 5; Charles Darwin University, *Submission 38*, p. 6; AAH, *Submission 64*, pp. 6–7; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 3.

⁷⁶ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Dr Priya Chacko, Executive Committee Member, SASAA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 2.

- 4.84 The declining number of both enrolments and course offerings reflects the cyclical tension between supply and demand in the university system. Lower enrolments result in less incentive for universities to offer courses, which leads to fewer offerings, which in turn contributes to lower enrolments in specialist areas.⁷⁹
- 4.85 In place of specialist courses, students are instead choosing or being channelled to generalist offerings as the result of what the University of Melbourne labelled a ‘post-area studies’ approach.⁸⁰
- 4.86 Through this approach, students engage with Asia through isolated courses or as part of more general subject offerings. While Asian knowledges, cultures and perspectives have been effectively integrated into some broader subjects at individual universities, there is no mechanism to ensure consistent, effective knowledge integration, particularly outside of humanities and social science subjects.⁸¹
- 4.87 As noted by AAH, this broad, sporadic engagement ultimately produces graduates with some general knowledge of Asia (‘Asia literacy’), but not a specialist understanding of the region (‘Asia capability’).⁸²
- 4.88 The Asia Institute, University of Melbourne argued that:
- While this approach has given students some exposure to Asia, it has been shallower than that offered by a traditional area studies approach centring language study, cultural immersion, and country expertise.⁸³
- 4.89 The way Australian universities structures its learning around subject matter material versus a study of a country is different to other nations, as explained by the Australia China Business Council:
- In relation to the education system at a university level, Australia structures its learning around subject matter like business, economics, law, politics—those are our areas of study. If we want to study a country, we study it under those disciplines. So, if we want to study Chinese business, we go to business school, and then we study China. But, in the US and the UK, the approach that they have in parallel involves area studies disciplines.

⁷⁹ Professor Wesley, The University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 11; Ms Hingor Chung, *Submission 14*, p. 16; Dr Gary Sigley, *Submission 114*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 2. See also, ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 5; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

⁸¹ Australia-Indonesian Centre, *Submission 103*, p. 5; Dr Kate Delmo, *Submission 131*, p. 2.

⁸² AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

⁸³ Asia Institute, University of Melbourne, *Submission 49*, p. 2.

That's a much bigger thing in the US and the UK and Europe than it is in Australia, where if we want to study Chinese business, just as we could go to a business school, we could also go to area studies, like the China Studies Centre, and study business under that. That provides a completely different view of the same thing. That perspective is also really important as we're not only trying to understand China through business but also trying to understand business through China.⁸⁴

- 4.90 In explaining the shift in student demand away from specialist study, ANU College of Asia and the Pacific explained:

The perceived value of that depth [of specialist knowledge] has declined over time. It's not that students think knowing about Asia or an Asian language is irrelevant to their future, it's that they think they can do so in less and less depth.⁸⁵

- 4.91 Throughout the inquiry, a key theme was the inability of government or universities to effectively signal the value of specialist Asia knowledge to students and increase student demand.⁸⁶

- 4.92 As Professor Ford argued:

In order to address this problem [of student demand], Asian languages and area studies must be positioned as high-prestige options worthy of serious consideration as qualifications in their own right, but also as a strategic complement to professional degrees. ... The absence of explicit government messaging that mastery of Asian Studies and languages is a core national asset signals that, despite the rhetoric, Asia expertise is not genuinely valued.⁸⁷

- 4.93 The role of Graduate Outcomes Statements was discussed as a mechanism to improve student interest in Asia and show the possible career trajectories available to students. Few, if any, Graduate Outcome Statements from universities specifically refer to knowledge of Asia.⁸⁸

- 4.94 In the case of languages, DASSH identified that 'only half of the 26 universities offering languages in Australia identified transferable skills and employment pathways as a benefit of studying language to students'.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Mr Victor Ruifeng Liang, Program Manager, China Capability, Australia China Business Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 11.

⁸⁵ Dr Mathew Davies, Associate Dean, Education, ANU CAP, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 24.

⁸⁶ See, for example, ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, pp. 4–5; DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 2; Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, pp. 3–4.

⁸⁷ Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 5.

⁸⁹ DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 2.

- 4.95 Without clear government and sector messaging and financial support, 'it is unsurprising that students choose degrees with clearer employment pathways'.⁹⁰

Diminishing postgraduate specialisation

- 4.96 While undergraduate area studies courses and in-country experiences are essential in introducing students to Asian language and culture, several submissions noted that advanced Asian studies courses through Honours and postgraduate research are best placed to provide a steady stream of graduates with Asia capability.⁹¹
- 4.97 Despite this, the number of specialist advanced Asian studies courses and enrolments has declined across the university sector.⁹² Out of more than 2,300 postgraduate coursework programs offered by Australian universities, only 21 offer an Asia-focused specialisation.⁹³
- 4.98 Additionally, of the 14 universities with China studies offerings, only seven offer an Honours program in Chinese. According to AAH, between 2017 and 2021 an average of three Australian students graduated with Honours in Chinese studies per year.⁹⁴
- 4.99 Similar to undergraduate language programs, a small number of postgraduate coursework offerings have experienced an uptick in enrolments in recent years as a result of international student demand. Chinese translation and interpreting masters programs have had increased enrolments, primarily from Chinese international students.⁹⁵ However, these enrolments do not reflect domestic student demand or capability building.
- 4.100 Doctoral specialisation in Asia is also declining, though there is minimal comprehensive data on this point. The ANU College of Asia and the Pacific stated that Australian PhD candidates increasingly do not study Asia itself but become experts 'in one subdimension of it' through doctoral study within another discipline, often without accompanying language proficiency.⁹⁶
- 4.101 Candidates with a specialised interest in Asia increasingly pursue advanced studies in-country, rather than in Australian institutions. It is unclear if this is due to a lack of specialist supervisors in Australia, the desire for immersive language or cultural experiences alongside their doctoral study, a lack of pathways within Australia, or a combination of the three.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 3.

⁹¹ Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 6; DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 1; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

⁹² ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 6; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 2.

⁹³ IEAA, *Submission 111*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

⁹⁵ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

⁹⁶ Dr Davies, ANU CAP, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 20.

⁹⁷ Dr Gerhard Hoffstaeder, Professor Antje Missbach and Dr Jemma Purdey, *Submission 101*, p. 4.

- 4.102 By comparison, international doctoral candidates are anecdotally more dominant in areas with an Asia specialisation than domestic students. As ASSA noted, these students often return to their home countries following the completion of their study, meaning that the Asia capability developed through their degree is exported, rather than building domestic sovereign capabilities.⁹⁸
- 4.103 The loss of Asian studies doctoral specialists poses a significant threat to the ability of universities to pass expertise and capability onto future generations of students and researchers, exacerbating the existing generalisation issues present at the undergraduate level.⁹⁹
- 4.104 Currently, there are few financial initiatives to encourage postgraduate students to study and engage with Asia. Previous funding channels, such as the Prime Minister's Australia-Asia Endeavour Award, have been discontinued.¹⁰⁰ Existing funding programs, such as the New Colombo Plan, are restricted to undergraduate students.¹⁰¹
- 4.105 Without funding to undertake in-country research, maintain language proficiency, or encourage students to specialise in Asia rather than other areas of interest, the pathways for undergraduate students to deeply engage with Asian studies throughout postgraduate specialisation are limited. This in turn disrupts the supply of academic specialists to inform business and policy approaches, and to replace the diminishing specialist research capacity within universities themselves.¹⁰²

Immersion as a bridge to Asia capability

- 4.106 Throughout the inquiry, many mechanisms were identified in the education system as sparking interest and life-long careers in Asia. Immersion programs were one of the most widely recognised.¹⁰³ Similar to the benefits of immersion as outlined in Chapter three, in-country immersion provides opportunities for students to engage with Asian knowledges, cultures, and languages in-country, and in some cases can facilitate the deep engagement required to begin to develop Asia capability.¹⁰⁴
- 4.107 Immersive and in-country experiences are 'crucial for developing depth of understanding' of both language and culture and a 'proven enabler of Asia capability'.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Professor McGregor, ASSA, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 5.

⁹⁹ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 6; DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 1; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA), *Submission 67*, p. 7.

¹⁰² ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 4.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 4; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 3; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 4; Dr Rowena Ward, *Submission 92*, p. 2; Dr Emily Hills and Mrs Janelle Horsington, *Submission 95*, p. 3; Associate Professor Yu Tao, *Submission 99*, p. 2; UQ, *Submission 138.1*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 4; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 4; Dr Rowena Ward, *Submission 92*, p. 2; Ms Hayley Winchcombe, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 3; Dr Emily Hills and Mrs Janelle Horsington, *Submission 95*, p. 3

4.108 UQ noted that long-stay, semester-based exchange programs are ‘arguably the best way to promote an immersive experience that maximises learning outcomes for students.’¹⁰⁶

4.109 Between 2014 and 2019, the number of Australian undergraduates studying in the Indo-Pacific increased by 83 per cent, from 8,437 students to 15,440.¹⁰⁷ Anecdotally, many of these experiences were prompted by ‘a chance find online’, and facilitated by scholarships and financial incentives such as OS-HELP Loans or the New Colombo Plan (NCP).¹⁰⁸

4.110 The Committee heard from students who undertook immersion programs in Asia and how this led to re-orientation of their careers towards the region. For example, Ms Hayley Winchcombe, a former NCP Fellow, told the Committee:

Then, at university, there was the chance to reorient my career towards Asia through the New Colombo Plan Scholarship. I really wasn't thinking long term when I saw that scholarship. I didn't know the opportunities that would come from it. When I saw the New Colombo Plan Scholarship, I thought, 'Wow, there's a good way to get some financial assistance,' because I was working several jobs at the time, dishwashing and other things. I was also aware the OS-HELP loan that you can get when you go on exchange is higher for Asia, and that was an incentive for me.¹⁰⁹

4.111 The NCP was frequently referenced as the major facilitator of in-country immersive opportunities for Australian undergraduate students.¹¹⁰ According to IEAA:

...the NCP has been a game-changer, creating significant goodwill and awareness of the Indo-Pacific, and has enabled diverse students from a broad range of disciplines to gain practical experience and build connections in the region.¹¹¹

4.112 As Professor Ford explained, the NCP ‘plays two vital roles’. Quality short-term programs ‘generate interest among students who are not already committed to the study of Asia’, and semester-long programs ‘provide space for deeper immersion’ in-country.¹¹²

4.113 The majority of immersive experiences conducted through the NCP are short term experiences. Between 2014 and 2019 only 25 per cent of students involved in NCP programs conducted an experience longer than four weeks.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ UQ, *Submission 138.1*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ IEAA, *Submission 111*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ms Mikaylie Page, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ Ms Winchcombe, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 22.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Go8, *Submission 36*, pp. 4–5; Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 4; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 2; IEAA, *Submission 111*, p. 5.

¹¹¹ IEAA, *Submission 111*, p. 5.

¹¹² Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 4.

¹¹³ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 2; Associate Professor Yu Tao, *Submission 99*, p. 2.

- 4.114 The value of these shorter programs was not consistently articulated throughout submissions. Professor Ford noted that students undertaking professional degrees or non-specialist study were often willing to sign up for short-term programs and were more likely to consider taking on language studies or pursuing further study on an Asian topic as a result of their experience.¹¹⁴
- 4.115 Conversely, the Group of Eight submission noted that, while short-term study can be beneficial to give students initial exposure to Asia, it is 'unlikely to deliver the depth of engagement necessary' to develop lasting connections and robust Asia capability.¹¹⁵
- 4.116 On 30 July 2025, the Government announced several reforms to the NCP, including a focus on longer-term programming. This included raising the minimum duration of mobility programs to four weeks.¹¹⁶
- 4.117 While submissions noted the importance of longer-term programs for language proficiency and deep cultural knowledge, they also highlighted the barriers the revised minimum duration may pose for students.¹¹⁷
- 4.118 The revisions to the structure of the NCP have revealed uncertainty about its purpose in developing Asia awareness and capability amongst Australian undergraduates. As articulated by the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies (Acicis):
- Given it is the only boat in the ocean at the moment in this policy area, [the New Colombo Plan] is being asked to do a lot. One of the tensions is: Is it supposed to be an initial exposure for Australian students to the region? ... Or is it a finishing school to deliver Australia the deep area expertise ... at the end of the graduate pipeline?¹¹⁸
- 4.119 The program was also critiqued for its lack of scale. For example, Professor Hugh White stated that:
- The New Colombo Plan is a great idea, but it's about 100 times too small. It's minuscule: 200 people going to Indonesia; 230 people going to China—this is in the DFAT figures for 2026. No. It needs 2,300 people—no, 23,000 people! That's what's proportionate to our interests, to our requirements.¹¹⁹
- 4.120 Submissions noted that the key challenge preventing the NCP, OS-HELP loans, and other, smaller funding initiatives from effectively building undergraduate Asia capability is their disconnection from a 'coherent national plan' for building domestic Asia capability.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Professor Michele Ford, *Submission 78*, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Go8, *Submission 36*, pp. 4–5.

¹¹⁶ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 9; Hayley Winchcombe, Lauren Alexander, Mikaylie Page, Yige Xu, and Racheline Tantular, *Submission 120*, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ Mr Liam Prince, Director, Acicis, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 45.

¹¹⁹ Professor Hugh White, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 46.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Mr Philipp Ivanov, *Submission 5*, p. 2; Mr Max Stretton, *Submission 40*, p. 3; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 4; Associate Professor Yu Tao, *Submission 99*, p. 2.

- 4.121 These programs often rely on student initiative or accidental discovery, rather than being advertised through consistent government and sector-wide messaging. This is particularly the case outside of inner-metro areas, where students outside major cities, or those with paid work commitments or caring responsibilities may have limited access to or knowledge of the schemes and supports available to facilitate in-country study.¹²¹

A cliff edge of research capability

- 4.122 After experiencing a period of growth in the 1960s and 1970s, Australia's Asia-related research expertise is declining.
- 4.123 Academics across Australia who benefited from the era of area study specialisation and related government incentives are either retiring or approaching retirement.¹²²
- 4.124 The SASAA explained that these academics are, 'by and large', not being replaced by a new generation of experts.¹²³ With the retirement of these experts comes 'a serious loss of intergenerational knowledge', compounded by the pipeline issues previously discussed.¹²⁴
- 4.125 According to the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, Asia-related expertise is now 'increasingly patchy, both across disciplines and in terms of country/subregion expertise'.¹²⁵
- 4.126 The retirement of existing experts is increasingly leaving significant capability gaps within the university sector. These gaps may accelerate the impacts of the closure of language programs and specialist degrees, further restrict the pipeline of students enrolling in postgraduate research courses with an Asia specialisation, and restrict the ability of universities to train new generations of students.¹²⁶
- 4.127 DASSH explained that:
- Once language and cultural capabilities are lost in Australia, we also lose a generation of PhD researchers and future experts. It is extremely difficult to rebuild expertise in this environment.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Mr Max Stretton, *Submission 40*, p. 3; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 90*, p. 4; Associate Professor Yu Tao, *Submission 99*, p. 2.

¹²² See for example: ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 6; Dr Rowena Ward, *Submission 92*, p. 2; Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson and Dr Elly Kent, *Submission 135*, p. 2; Dr Bowles, SASAA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 3.

¹²³ Dr Bowles, SASAA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Dr Mark Harrison, *Submission 7*, p. 3.

¹²⁵ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 6.

¹²⁶ ANU CAP, *Submission 32*, p. 6; Dr Rowena Ward, *Submission 92*, p. 2; Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson and Dr Elly Kent, *Submission 135*, p. 2; Dr Bowles, SASAA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 3.

¹²⁷ DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 1.

- 4.128 Already, many current Asian studies specialists in universities were recruited from overseas. As explained by Dr Christopher Diamond, this reliance on foreign universities for supplying future experts leaves Australia ‘depending on the waxing and waning support for the study of Asia by other countries’.¹²⁸
- 4.129 To maintain a pipeline of domestic Asia experts, Australia needs to both invest in pathways for students coming up through undergraduate and postgraduate degree structures and invest in current research expertise across the university sector.¹²⁹

Research funding and the National Science and Research Priorities

- 4.130 Research funding is a central component of maintaining and rebuilding research expertise in Asian language and cultural studies across the university sector. It enables academics to deepen their area expertise, train future generations of researchers through inbuilt postgraduate and postdoctoral funding, and engage with regional discussions and collaborations.¹³⁰
- 4.131 However, despite its importance, funding for Asia-related research has gradually declined across the university sector. ASSA noted that this decline has applied across both the total number of projects receiving government funding and the value of total funding received.¹³¹
- 4.132 For example, AAH stated that only 91 of the over 9,000 Australian Research Council Linkage Grants awarded between 2002 and 2022 focused on China.¹³² There has never been an ARC Centre of Excellence focused on Asian or Asian subregional studies.¹³³
- 4.133 Since 2010 the ARC has funded seven projects in relation to ‘Asian Language and Regional Studies’: two projects on Chinese languages (\$891,000), four projects on Indonesian languages (\$1,061,848), and one project on Japanese languages (\$164,470).¹³⁴
- 4.134 Additionally, ASSA noted that the ARC used to include ‘understanding the region and our world’ as a strategic indicator for researchers to signal as part of grant applications. The removal of this strategic indicator means that ‘every researcher applying for ARC funding has to make an individual case for why Asia matters, where it used to be an automatic priority’.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Dr Christopher Diamond, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 13.

¹²⁹ Dr Diamond, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 13.

¹³⁰ Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 6; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 10; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 4.

¹³¹ ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 4.

¹³² AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 10.

¹³³ Go8, *Submission 36*, p. 6; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 10.

¹³⁴ DoE, *Submission 191.2*, p. 6.

¹³⁵ Professor McGregor, ASSA, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 8.

- 4.135 Without clear funding avenues for established researchers, there is little opportunity for academics to develop, maintain, and transfer the Asia-related research expertise necessary to ensure Australian universities remain equipped to produce Asia capable graduates.¹³⁶
- 4.136 A potential policy lever to target grant funding to Asian studies research projects already exists: the National Science and Research Priorities (Priorities). The Priorities are designed to focus research investment across government, universities, and industries through five areas of critical policy research.¹³⁷
- 4.137 Researchers applying for ARC funding are required to indicate whether their proposed research relates to one of the Priorities. The ARC reports to government on the proportion of ARC-funded projects that relate to the Priorities each year.
- 4.138 As highlighted by ASSA, Asian language and cultural studies are not recognised by the National Science and Research Priorities. While the ARC does fund research that is not directly aligned to the Priorities, the absence of Asian studies from the framework may signal to the ARC, researchers, and universities that Asia capability is not considered an area of national priority or concern.¹³⁸
- 4.139 Several submissions recommended including Asian language and cultural studies within the National Science and Research Priorities, either explicitly or as part of broader recommendations around creating a cohesive national strategy and policy around Asia capability.¹³⁹
- 4.140 This would not only provide a clear structure for targeted funding for Asia-related research, but in turn help rebuild and strengthen the research expertise required to educate the next generation of Australians.

What is holding the system together?

- 4.141 As previously discussed, there is a lack of coordination across the different stages of the education system. At the tertiary level, it was highlighted that there is a need for greater policy cohesion and strategic protection for Asian studies.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ ASSA, *Submission 72*, pp. 4–5; National Foundation for Australia-China Relations, *Submission 112*, p. 4–5.

¹³⁷ For an overview of the National Science and Research Priorities, see, Department of Industry, Sciences and Resources, Australia's National Science and Research Priorities, August 2024, <https://www.industry.gov.au/publications/national-science-and-research-priorities-2024> (accessed 4 May 2026).

¹³⁸ ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 4.

¹³⁹ See, for example, DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 5; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 6; ASSA, *Submission 72*, p. 4; Innovative Research Universities, *Submission 122*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Mr Philipp Ivanov, *Submission 5*, pp. 2–4; Charles Darwin University, *Submission 38*, p. 5; Griffith Asia Institute, *Submission 56*, p. 5; Professor Melissa Crouch, *Submission 60*, p. 4; Dr Kate Delmo, *Submission 131*, p. 4.

- 4.142 Many inquiry participants pointed to the role that the newly established Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) could have in overseeing and informing this national approach to building Asia capability.¹⁴¹
- 4.143 The ATEC is the independent steward for Australia's higher education system. It commenced operations in an interim capacity on 1 July 2025 and was formally established following the passage of the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026*.¹⁴²
- 4.144 The ATEC will provide strategic leadership and oversight of the Australian higher education sector. It will support the Australian Government to reach its goal for 80 per cent of working aged Australians to complete a tertiary education qualification by 2050, and to improve equity in who participates and succeeds across the sector.¹⁴³
- 4.145 The ATEC's structure offers three key areas in which it could contribute to building Asia capability in the tertiary education sector: the Statement of Strategic Priorities; mission-based compacts with higher education providers; and its data collection, advisory, and inquiry capabilities.

Statement of Strategic Priorities

- 4.146 The ATEC will develop a biennial Statement of Strategic Priorities (SSP). The SSP will set out the ATEC's view of the short and medium-term direction for Australia's tertiary education sector.¹⁴⁴ The first SSP is expected to be published by 1 January 2027.¹⁴⁵ The consultation process for developing these priorities will commence in the second half of 2026.¹⁴⁶
- 4.147 The SSP offers an opportunity for ATEC to clearly articulate the importance of developing Asia capability through the university sector as a national priority.¹⁴⁷
- 4.148 AAH, for example, recommended that the ATEC 'acknowledge Asia Capability as one of Australia's priority national capabilities'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ See, for example: DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 5; AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 9; AAH, *Submission 64.4*, pp. 2–4; Professor Greg Fox, Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, The University of Sydney, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 13.

¹⁴² DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 10; Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC), 'Australian Tertiary Education Commission formally established', *Media Release*, 29 April 2026.

¹⁴³ ATEC, ATEC's role and functions, <https://www.atec.gov.au/about-atec/atecs-role-and-functions> (accessed 4 May 2026).

¹⁴⁴ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 10; ATEC, Strategic priorities & workplan, <https://www.atec.gov.au/strategy/strategic-priorities-workplan> (accessed 4 May 2026).

¹⁴⁵ *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026*, Section 43(2), p. 32.

¹⁴⁶ ATEC, Strategic priorities & workplan, <https://www.atec.gov.au/strategy/strategic-priorities-workplan> (accessed 4 May 2026).

¹⁴⁷ See, for example: AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 9; Innovative Research Universities, *Submission 122*, p. 4; Dr Diamond, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 14; Professor Wesley, The University of Melbourne, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 15.

¹⁴⁸ AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 9.

- 4.149 Similarly, DASSH recommended that the ATEC ‘should develop a clear strategy’ in relation to Asia capability across the university sector and across key government departments and agencies.¹⁴⁹
- 4.150 DoE noted that the ATEC would work with institutions to ensure that, collectively, the higher education sector was meeting the national strategic priorities. The main way this will be achieved is through the creation of mission-based compacts with individual institutions.¹⁵⁰

Mission based compacts

- 4.151 A key theme throughout the submissions from the higher education sector was the potential of the ATEC’s mission-based compacts to highlight the importance of Asia capability to the tertiary sector and preserve language and area studies offerings.¹⁵¹
- 4.152 The ATEC is empowered to develop mission-based compacts with tertiary institutions. These will either take the form of a specific agreement with a higher education provider or a default mission based compact for institutions where a negotiated compact is not in force.¹⁵²
- 4.153 Mission based compacts will clearly set out a shared understanding between the ATEC and each provider about the provider’s role within the tertiary education system. The compacts will support higher education providers to pursue their unique goals and mission, while also outlining how they will contribute to key national priorities, support diversity within the system, and deliver strong outcomes for students and local communities.¹⁵³
- 4.154 As explained by DoE:
- While compacts managed by the ATEC are not designed to impose a uniform approach across all providers, the ATEC’s stewardship role requires that, collectively, there is sufficient coverage of national priorities across the system. In the event that building Asia capability is identified as a national priority, the ATEC would endeavour to ensure that enough providers are contributing at a level that meets national need.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ Mr Turvey, Executive Director, ATEC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ See for example, AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 4; Indo-Pacific Research Centre, Murdoch University, *Submission 108*, p. 2; Innovative Research Universities, *Submission 122*, p. 10; Professor Heather Sharon Zwicker, Executive Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 15.

¹⁵² *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026*, Section 27(1), p. 20 and Section 36(1), p. 25.

¹⁵³ ATEC, *Mission based compacts*, <https://www.atec.gov.au/what-we-do/mission-based-compacts> (accessed 4 May 2026).

¹⁵⁴ DoE, *Submission 191*, p. 11.

- 4.155 Several submissions noted that these compacts provide an opportunity to encourage higher education providers to engage with Asia capability as a national priority in a way that suits the needs and audience of the institution.¹⁵⁵
- 4.156 Innovative Research Universities recommended that the ATEC ‘incorporate Asian languages and culture education and research, as appropriate’, in new university mission-based compact agreements with government.’¹⁵⁶ Further, these compacts could assist in keeping language courses open even where student numbers are low by protecting key national capabilities while also allowing universities to specialise and remain focused on their individual goals and communities.¹⁵⁷
- 4.157 Similarly, Murdoch University highlighted that ‘embedding Asia literacy in these mission-based compacts will significantly enhance Australia’s Asia capability’, and recommended Asian studies (language, commerce, politics and culture) be embedded in mission-based compacts between the ATEC and universities.¹⁵⁸
- 4.158 UQ also suggested that the ATEC’s mission-based compacts ‘should explicitly recognise Asia literacy as a national priority’. They stated that the compacts should include incentives for both institutions that maintain programs and institutions that extend access to language learning to students where programs no longer exist.¹⁵⁹
- UQ also noted the potential for mission-based compacts and other activities of the ATEC to encourage collaboration across the tertiary sector in relation to language learning.¹⁶⁰
- 4.159 Another idea which was floated during the discussion on the role of ATEC, was to have a multi-institutional mission based compact. ATEC noted that while the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026* specifies bilateral compacts between a university and the Commonwealth, there is nothing in the relevant legislation that prevents a ‘broader and collaborative approach’¹⁶¹ and that the Commonwealth wants the sector to collaborate to achieve the outcomes that are required for students in the nation.¹⁶²
- 4.160 While the exact nature of the mission-based compacts has not yet been determined, they are well-placed to encourage universities to maintain Asian language and area studies programs, particularly if Asia capability is identified as a strategic priority by the ATEC or the government.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ See for example: AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 4; Indo-Pacific Research Centre, Murdoch University, *Submission 108*, p. 2; Innovative Research Universities, *Submission 122*, p. 10; Professor Zwicker, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 15.

¹⁵⁶ Innovative Research Universities, *Submission 122*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Innovative Research Universities, *Submission 122*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ Indo-Pacific Research Centre, Murdoch University, *Submission 108*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ Professor Zwicker, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Professor Zwicker, UQ, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 15.

¹⁶¹ Mr Turvey, ATEC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 10; AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 7.

¹⁶² Mr Turvey, ATEC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 10; AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 7.

¹⁶³ Mr Turvey, ATEC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 10; AAH, *Submission 64.4*, pp. 4–5.

Data collection and advisory functions

- 4.161 As part of its functions laid out in Section 11 of the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026*, ATEC is empowered to ‘undertake or coordinate research and data analysis activities’ in relation to its other functions.¹⁶⁴ ATEC is also able to provide independent advice and recommendations to the Government on matters including the strategic direction and future demands and needs of the higher education system.¹⁶⁵
- 4.162 A consistent theme throughout the inquiry has been the lack of detailed, national data in relation to the provision of Asian language and area studies across the university sector. This lack of data impacts the ability to track the state of Asia capability in the higher education sector, and in turn to develop cohesive, informed policies to prioritise Asia capability within and beyond the higher education sector.¹⁶⁶
- 4.163 Undergraduate and postgraduate student enrolment, load, and completions data cannot be disaggregated to identify specific areas of study, including individual language enrolments.¹⁶⁷ Most existing disaggregated data has been collected by academic researchers, rather than government departments.¹⁶⁸
- 4.164 AAH suggested that the ATEC may be able to address ‘major data deficits’ as part of its reporting and advice functions.¹⁶⁹ It submitted that the ATEC should have a standing capacity for robust data collection to inform decision making, mission-based compacts, funding allocations, and Ministerial advice. This access to real-time, disaggregated data ‘will improve transparency, trust and system planning.’¹⁷⁰
- 4.165 Similarly, ASSA suggested that the ATEC’s data capability and analytical and reporting functions could be central to its potential to provide national oversight and planning of Australia’s Asia capability in the tertiary sector.¹⁷¹
- 4.166 ATEC highlighted the potentials of its reporting functions for tracking data on Asian language and cultural studies courses and engagements, and that the ATEC is currently ‘working through how we can best keep abreast of course offerings and course closure decisions of universities’, including in Asian studies.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁴ *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Act 2026*, Section 11(j), p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ ATEC, ATEC advice, <https://www.atec.gov.au/strategy/atec-advice> (accessed 5 May 2026).

¹⁶⁶ See for example: Charles Darwin University, *Submission 38*, p. 4; DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 2; Monash University, *Submission 55*, p. 3; ASSA, *Submission 72*, pp. 3–4.

¹⁶⁷ ASSA, *Submission 72*, pp. 3–4; DoE, *Submission 191.1*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, DASSH, *Submission 43*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁰ AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 5.

¹⁷¹ ASSA, *Submission 72.1*, p. 1.

¹⁷² Mr Turvey, ATEC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 2.

- 4.167 ATEC also noted that performance metrics and related reporting would be included in mission-based compacts, particularly around areas of priority. They further explained that if the government or the ATEC decided to prioritise Asian studies, 'that would naturally trigger performance information being included in the compacts.' This data would then feed into the ATEC's various reporting functions, including its annual report on the state of the tertiary system.¹⁷³
- 4.168 Through detailed data collection and analysis, informing biennial SSPs and mission-based compacts with tertiary institutions, the ATEC is well placed to formalise the importance of Asia capability as a domestic priority within the higher education sector, and oversee measures and reporting in relation to this area.¹⁷⁴

Committee comment

- 4.169 Australia's tertiary education institutions play a vital dual teaching and research role in Australia's sovereign Asia capability, but the funding structures of our higher education system have placed both functions under existential strain. University language programs and area studies courses are essential for producing deep Asia expertise in Australia's emerging leaders but are closing at an alarming rate. There has been a shift away for specialisation towards generalist study and, language programs, where available, are being kept afloat by international students. A generation of Asia experts are retiring without a future generation ready to replace this expertise.
- 4.170 The current structure of the Australian tertiary system is disincentivising young Australians from pursuing degrees and careers which focus on Asia.
- 4.171 This is particularly pronounced in the study of Asian languages. The diminishing pipeline of students from Year 12 into the university sector is adversely affecting the ability of universities to continue offering Asian language courses. Low course enrolments place language classes at risk of closure, further restricting study options.
- 4.172 In addition, financial structures for both students and universities make the study of Asian languages and cultures an unattractive option. While the Job Ready Graduates package lowered the student contribution for language studies and was intended to direct students towards certain subject areas, it has clearly failed to achieve this goal and language enrolments have not increased as a result of the program.
- 4.173 This situation coupled with the increased cost of humanities degrees has unintentionally resulted in students being disincentivised from enrolling in area studies and Asian languages.

¹⁷³ Mr Turvey, ATEC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 30 April 2026, p. 10.

¹⁷⁴ AAH, *Submission 64.4*, p. 5; ASSA, *Submission 72.1*, pp. 1–2.

- 4.174 From the university perspective, financial structures and mechanisms do not encourage universities to offer language programs. Language programs are costly to run and persistent low enrolments make them an easy target for university administrations seeking to save money.
- 4.175 Previous initiatives, such as the protections for Nationally Strategic Languages in the Commonwealth Grant Scheme had a role in signalling to the sector and to students about the importance of Asian language study.
- 4.176 At present, students are not financially incentivised to study Asian languages or cultures, academics are not financially incentivised to pursue careers focused on the study of Asia and Australia's universities are not financially incentivised to deliver the vital sovereign Asia capabilities Australia requires.
- 4.177 The establishment of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission provides an opportunity for a cohesive government approach to embedding Asia capability within the higher education sector.
- 4.178 The ability of ATEC to set strategic priorities for the sector and use these to inform mission-based compacts with institutions creates an opportunity to highlight Asia capability as a priority national capability for the sector.
- 4.179 ATEC has a role in ensuring that the university sector is delivering a breadth of skills and qualifications and that these skills meet the needs of Australia's strategic interests. Proactive government intervention is required to signal to the sector the importance of building Asia capability.
- 4.180 The Committee recognises that the legislation governing ATEC specifies mission-based compacts as bilateral agreements, however, there does appear to be flexibility within the legislation to support a collaborative, system-wide approach. A broader 'Asia Capability Compact' which covers multiple institutions could be an innovative mechanism to build capability that the market will not sustain on its own.
- 4.181 An Asia Capability Compact should be designed with the following features:
- Designate, across the sector, institutions to serve as anchor providers (including Language Hubs) for each priority Asian language and area studies field, so that national coverage does not depend on the independent decisions of individual universities.
 - Guarantee that any domestic student at any Australian university can enrol in a priority Asian language, including through cross-institutional arrangements.
 - Be underpinned by funding that removes the disincentive to provide languages, settled through the Commission's costing and pricing work, whether by a demand-driven Commonwealth Supported Place carve-out for Asian languages, ring-fenced structural-protection funding for sub-scale but nationally important programs, or both.

- Protect designated programs from closure without the ATEC's agreement.
- Carry performance metrics and public reporting on national provision.

Recommendation 19

4.182 The Committee recommends that the Australian Tertiary Education Commission include Asia capability in its Statement of Strategic Priorities.

Recommendation 20

4.183 The Committee recommends that the Australian Tertiary Education Commission establish an Asia Capability Compact; a coordinated system-level set of mission based compact obligations that, taken together, guarantee the sustained national provision of priority Asian languages and area studies.

Recommendation 21

4.184 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government re-introduce protections for priority Asian languages in Commonwealth Grant Scheme agreements.

Recommendation 22

4.185 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review higher education funding structures and develop targeted interventions to support the study of priority Asian languages, countries, and cultures.

4.186 Not all universities will have the capacity to offer a breadth of Asian languages. Cross-institutional language delivery models, such as hub and spoke models offer an opportunity to ensure languages are accessible to a broader range of students, either as credit-bearing components of their degree or through a separate Diploma of Languages. Models such as the Brisbane Universities Languages Alliance and the Adelaide University/Flinders University language teaching agreement demonstrate the ways this model can operate between institutions.

4.187 While several issues were identified in the successful implementation of hub and spoke models and cross institutional study, the model presents an opportunity to bolster the current capacity of the sector to teach languages and it is a mechanism to build broader Asian language offerings across the system.

4.188 Properly funded and structured, hub and spoke models offer a way to facilitate cross-institutional access for students to study Asian languages and encourage collaboration between institutions to strengthen both hub and spoke capability. Hubs in this arrangement should be understood as anchoring institutions that sustain teaching and research capacity, rather than as exclusive providers of language and area studies offerings.

Recommendation 23

- 4.189 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, working through the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, establish a network of Asian Language Hubs to guarantee the national provision of, and cross-institutional access to, priority Asian language study.**

A Language Hub would be a university designated, for one or more priority Asian languages to:

- **Deliver a full pathway in that language from beginner to advanced level, including at least one national intensive program open to enrolment by students of any Australian university.**
- **Accept and teach students from other universities (spoke institutions) through a guaranteed cross-institutional enrolment arrangement, with seamless credit transfer**
- **Pair language teaching with area studies content such as history, politics and society, so that students develop deep regional capability and not language skills alone.**
- **Undertake sector outreach and sustain advanced and Honours pathways that feed the national research pipeline.**

To make the network sustainable, the funding arrangements should consider:

- **Ensuring a Hub is funded for the students it teaches from other institutions rather than penalised for doing so, by resolving which institution holds the Commonwealth Supported Place and ensuring the Hub receives the full resourcing rate for cross-institutional teaching.**
- **Giving spoke institutions an incentive to direct students to Hubs while retaining a local teaching presence, such as a local tutor and a viable on-campus cohort, rather than treating the Hub as a replacement for their own capability.**

- 4.190 Beyond language studies, there has been shift towards generalist engagement with Asia rather than specialisation. While it is a positive development that students are now being exposed to more Asian content than before their degrees, it is concerning that this has coincided with a decline in specialisation in Asia.**
- 4.191 Australia's Asia capability depends on the combination of deep understanding of both language study and area studies across diverse areas – history, politics, sociology, economics, literature, and culture. Generalist degree structures, particularly when combined with declining language course offerings and enrolments, do not readily facilitate the development of this deep regional knowledge, or set students up with the interest or connections required to encourage postgraduate specialisation.**

- 4.192 The decline in specialisation is leading to lower enrolments in honours and higher degree research programs dedicated to the study of Asia. This in turn is creating a risk to the future academic expertise and research capabilities of Australian universities.
- 4.193 This issue in attracting and training the next generation of academic Asia experts is compounded by the erosion of a domestic, sustained research capability in Asia studies. Academic research, particularly research that involves in-country immersion or provides opportunities for postgraduate and postdoctoral development, requires funding to complete. However, the Australian funding landscape, and particularly the Australian Research Council grant program, has failed to promote Asia-focused research across the university sector.
- 4.194 Asia capability is not recognised by the National Science and Research Priorities, despite ongoing government focus on the region.
- 4.195 Without funding, it is difficult for academics to sustain research expertise and collaborative networks. This in turn limits the ability of researchers to train postgraduate students, maintain area studies majors or units, and remain connected to discussions occurring in the region. Clear avenues for research funding for Asian studies projects are necessary to maintain and rebuild the academic expertise that shapes graduate Asia capability.

Recommendation 24

- 4.196 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government designate the study of Asia as a priority research area in the National Science and Research Priorities.**

Recommendation 25

- 4.197 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government review funding arrangements for higher degree research programs and post-doctoral research and prioritise Asia related research within existing arrangements.**
- 4.198 The Committee repeatedly heard about the value of in-country and immersive experiences for undergraduate and graduate students. Overseas travel, particularly for long periods of time, can be difficult for students to sustain financially.
- 4.199 At the undergraduate level, there are several high impact mechanisms available to students, such as the New Colombo Plan, to travel and undertake study and internships in Asia.
- 4.200 At the post-graduate level, many programs once existed but currently there are no targeted initiatives for post-graduate students and academics to participate in short- and long-term exchange programs in Asia.

Recommendation 26

- 4.201 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue its approach of supporting longer term, language focused in-country study through the New Colombo Plan and consider separate funding program for post-graduate students, and academics to undertake research in Asia.**



5. Connecting classrooms and communities

- 5.1 Australia is a vibrant and diverse multicultural society. At the last census, around 17 per cent of Australians identified as having Asian heritage and nearly 5.8 million people or 22.8 per cent of Australian residents spoke a language other than English at home.¹ The top five languages other than English spoken in Australia are Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese, Cantonese, and Punjabi.²
- 5.2 The knowledge of Australia's diaspora communities is often shared in community language schools across the country. These informal schools and programs provide the opportunity for heritage and non-heritage language speakers to develop and advance language skills and cultural knowledge and capabilities. Despite the importance of these informal learning opportunities and their reach into Australian communities, they are not well connected to the formal education system.
- 5.3 This chapter explores the role of community language program as an informal education opportunity. It covers barriers faced by these programs in supporting the development of Australia's Asia capabilities and connecting to the formal education system.
- 5.4 Following, a case study is presented on South Asian languages and the programs within the community seeking to improve the uptake of these languages and the connections between formal and informal educational settings.

Australia's Asian-Australian communities

- 5.5 Australia's Asian-Australian communities are among the nation's greatest sources of latent Asia capability, a capability that has been all too often under-utilised within Australian institutions in recent decades. However, it is important to note from the outset that heritage and capability are not the same thing. The Asia capability of Asian-Australians varies enormously from one person to the next as a result of the different life experiences of individuals. Notably, heritage language ability fades across the generations unless families invest significant time, effort and resources into its maintenance.

¹ The Social Policy Group, *Submission 19*, p. 4; Dr Kayoko Hashimoto, *Submission 26*, p. 2.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Cultural diversity: Census 2021*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/cultural-diversity-census/latest-release>, 28 June 2022 (accessed 17 June 2026).

5.6 As Dr Jennifer Hsu told the Committee:

The Asian diaspora is a skilled, entrepreneurial asset, but migration alone doesn't guarantee the language and cultural skills needed for meaningful engagement with Asia. Heritage language retention drops off sharply amongst second-generation Asian Australians, particularly as school commitments increase and language learning is deprioritised outside the core curriculum.³

5.7 Witnesses' own experiences bore this out. Ms Danielle Rajendram described building her Asia capability not through heritage but through formal study:

My father is a Sri Lankan migrant and he never taught me any Asian languages. I never learned Asian languages through that family acquisition pathway... I attended university, studied Asian studies and tried to build my own Asian capabilities by learning Japanese.⁴

5.8 Far from treating formal language education as redundant, diaspora families are often the most frustrated by its absence. Ms Lydia Santoso told the Committee that her daughter wanted to study Indonesian but her school did not offer it, and that distance education was not available until Year 9—'two years of lost opportunity and lost learning'.⁵ Several such families' experiences are set out in the case studies that follow.

5.9 There is a related risk where institutions, rather than building their own expertise, lean on the assumed knowledge of diaspora staff or communities. As one submission put it in the context of India:

Australians seeking knowledge of India tend to rely on the tacit, unsystematic understandings that Indian-Australians have brought with them from their home country... Diaspora guidance, however well-intentioned and well-informed, cannot take the place of serious quantitative, statistical expertise honed over years of systematic academic study.⁶

5.10 This argument cuts the other way as well. Just as heritage does not guarantee capability, neither does it define the limits of what a diaspora member can contribute. The potential Asia capability of Australia's diaspora communities is not confined to their own cultural and linguistic heritage. Research on language learning indicates that a person who already speaks a second language has a significant advantage in acquiring a third. A young Australian who grows up bilingual in, say, Vietnamese is well placed to deepen that language and to take up Indonesian, Mandarin or Hindi.

³ Dr Jennifer Hsu, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 2.

⁴ Ms Danielle Rajendram, Director, Advisory and Insights, Asialink Business, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 8.

⁵ Ms Lydia Santoso, Chair, Australia Indonesia Institute; and National Vice-President, Australia Indonesia Council, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 8.

⁶ Associate Professor Salvatore Babones, *Submission 59*, p. 1.

- 5.11 To see diaspora members as defined by their ethnic heritage is to miss this potential. The diaspora opportunity is twofold. To draw on the capability the diaspora already has, and to invest in the capabilities that its members are well placed to build.

Community language education in Australia

- 5.12 Community language schools have played a unique and substantial role in contributing to language and cultural provision in Australia. In 2023, there were 631 community language schools, offering over 100 languages and teaching over 100,000 students.⁷
- 5.13 The reach and impact of community language schools is far and wide, and yet these schools and programs are often excluded and disconnected from the mainstream education system.⁸
- 5.14 The Monash Japanese Language Education Centre highlighted the strengths of community language education and the role heritage communities have in supporting the formal education system:

Heritage language education and mainstream school programs remain largely disconnected, despite their shared goals. Australia's vibrant diaspora and community language schools represent an untapped resource for strengthening Asia capability. Connecting these two sectors would not only support heritage learners but also provide all students with authentic cultural and linguistic experiences. Heritage communities can play a vital role in sustaining language programs and modelling the lived value of multilingualism.⁹

- 5.15 Unlike the formal education system, demand for language education in the community sector has remained stable and, in some cases, demand is growing. Community language schools are also experiencing a gradual increase in participation from non-native or non-background learners; however, most students come from heritage language backgrounds.¹⁰
- 5.16 Demand for Asian language education has not disappeared in Australia, it has shifted from the mainstream into community-based education. Sustained demand for languages education persists when learning is culturally connected and community supported.¹¹

⁷ Per Capita. *Submission 98*, p. 14.

⁸ See, for example: RMIT Community Languages Teacher Education Program, *Submission 150*, p. 2; Monash Japanese Language Education Centre, *Submission 140*, p. 4; Chinese Language Teachers' Association of Victoria (CLTAV), *Submission 85*, p. 3; Council of Chinese Language Schools Victoria (CCLSV), *Submission 16*, p. 2.

⁹ Monash Japanese Language Education Centre, *Submission 140*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Community Languages Australia, *Submission 195*, pp. 1–2.

¹¹ Community Languages Australia, *Submission 195*, p. 1.

- 5.17 Community language schools can receive accreditation to teach senior secondary curriculum languages. However, there is no mechanism for junior secondary school accreditation and there is a failure to capture the language learning journey across the education system.¹²
- 5.18 The misalignment between community language education and the mainstream education system creates barriers for heritage and non-heritage language speakers in the school system. Engagement between the two sectors can bring a range of benefits and depth to the study of Asia and Asian languages.¹³
- 5.19 The Council of Chinese Language Schools Victoria, described the negative impacts of this disconnection:
- In Victoria alone, community language schools teach more than 50 languages to more than 40,000 students. Specifically, there are 29 Chinese community language schools in Victoria supporting 18,649 enrolled students. This is done by a dedicated workforce of more than 900 teachers. But despite all of these numbers, our students and teachers remain under-recognised in society for their studies in community language schools. With that, a lot of students tend to drop out in senior school because they are finding it hard to continue or hard to be recognised in the mainstream education system.¹⁴
- 5.20 Heritage and non-heritage speakers who receive language instruction through community language programs face difficulty in receiving recognition of their language skills by the formal education system. For example, Ms Racheline Tantular told the Committee:
- I speak Indonesian, Mandarin and Japanese. I started learning Mandarin through primary school and also attended community schools for two hours on a Saturday morning but found that I was penalised for this when I moved into high school and would have been forced to go into the background language stream if I wanted to continue studying Mandarin, despite my family not speaking it at home.¹⁵
- 5.21 The community language sector suffers from the social pressures and lack of value placed on language learning by the broader community. Second and subsequent generations of Asian Australian families are struggling to retain heritage language skills. For example, Dr Jennifer Hsu said:

¹² See, for example: Ms Delan Lin, CCLSV, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 25; Mr Fahry Abubaker, Executive Officer, AFESA Community Languages Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 32.

¹³ See, for example: Ms Lin, CCLSV, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, pp. 21–22; Mr Tarun Balaji Navaneetha Krishnan, President, South Indian Community (SIC), *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 10; Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), *Submission 10*, pp. 8, 12–13; Dr Mandy Scott, Public Officer, Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia (ALMA), *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, pp. 47–48.

¹⁴ Ms Lin, CCLSV, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 21.

¹⁵ Ms Racheline Tantular, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 18.

The language and cultural studies need to be fostered at an early age; otherwise, parents like me are going to make the cost–benefit analysis: 'Do I want my kid to excel at sports, which is valued in Australian society, or'—at the moment, it's an either/or option. As the child gets older, the pressures and the extracurricular activities and the core curriculum activities become greater and greater. In my conversations with Chinese heritage parents and for-profit Mandarin schools in Sydney, they say they see a big drop-off in language enrolments from year 2 onwards. They have the biggest enrolments from K to year 2 for Mandarin language learning, but after year 2 that really drops off because parents now prioritise having their kids excel in maths or in English or in all the other core curriculum subjects.¹⁶

- 5.22 The Australia China Business Council observed a similar trend and described how heritage language skills are not as valued as other subjects, exam results, and more broadly, fitting in with Australian society.¹⁷
- 5.23 When heritage languages are valued by the formal education system and offered as a subject in schools, parents see the value of their children learning a heritage language and these negative perceptions can shift.¹⁸
- 5.24 There was a call for greater recognition of community language programs and for better integration and coordination between community and heritage languages and the formal school curriculum.¹⁹
- 5.25 The Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) currently runs the Community Language Schools Grant (CLSG) program. One aspect of the operation of the CLSG is to support community language programs in their efforts to align language provision with the formal education system. The CLSG is funded for \$25.6 million over four years from 2025–26 and has two streams:
 - Stream One provides \$15.5 million to community language schools to support the operational costs of program delivery, professional development and teacher training, and to develop new online teaching material to boost enrolments.
 - Stream Two provides \$5 million to support more students to become fluent in Asian languages in Years 11 and 12.²⁰

¹⁶ Dr Hsu, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 5.

¹⁷ Mr Victor Ruifeng Liang, Program Manager, China Capability, Australia China Business Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 16.

¹⁸ Mrs Latha Navaneetha Krishnan, Founder and Secretary, SIC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 10.

¹⁹ Ms Lin, CCLSV, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 25, The RMIT Community Languages Teacher Education Program, *Submission 150*, pp. 2–4.

²⁰ Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), *Submission 109*, p. 5.

- 5.26 The guidelines for stream one of the CLSG focus on supporting secondary students to build fluency in an Asian language, enhancing Asian cultural and language literacy to take advantage of economic opportunities in the region, and enabling the participation of young Australians in a broader range of jobs.

At the time of the inquiry, the guidelines for round two were being developed and consideration was being given to the following elements of grant criteria:

- Developing a curriculum for an Asian language that does not currently have an established or consistent curriculum for use across community language schools.
- Developing and delivering professional development training for community language teachers to strengthen their capability to teach Asian languages at the secondary school level and building the capacity of community language schools to deliver Asian language education as part of Year 11 and 12 curriculums.
- Developing Asian language teaching materials or resources at the secondary level to be implemented across multiple community language schools.
- Establishing a shared digital portal with resources to support Asian language learning and teaching at the secondary level which is accessible to community language schools across jurisdictions.²¹

- 5.27 In designing the CLSG, Home Affairs sought to come up with a list of priority Asian languages which would be eligible for a grant program and did not want to unwittingly exclude particular languages.²²

- 5.28 Consultations on the CLSG revealed important findings about the role of community languages education and its connections to the formal education sector. Home Affairs found that retention of Year 11 and 12 students in a community language school tended to be higher if it was already in the national curriculum and it was contributing to student outcomes and scores for university admissions.²³

- 5.29 Home Affairs also outlined how community languages can be incorporated into the curriculum:

... They have an established infrastructure around that community. Where there are new and emerging communities we make sure, as they become more organised into community associations, they get information around programs that might be available. It certainly takes a number of years for that to wash through the system. We couldn't comment on the VCE or HSC component of the formalisation, but certainly there's continued growth in communities accessing the program.²⁴

²¹ Home Affairs, *Submission 109.2*, pp. 5–6.

²² Mr Malcolm McAllister, Assistant Secretary, Special Envoy Support and Management Branch, Office for Multicultural Affairs Division, Home Affairs, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 6.

²³ Mr McAllister, Home Affairs, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 8.

²⁴ Ms Sneha Chatterjee, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Multicultural Affairs Division, Home Affairs, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 9.

- 5.30 The Committee heard that the community language sector was appreciative of the grants and support provided through this scheme but the current split of government responsibilities for education and community languages is creating a further disconnect. Community languages are linked to society, culture and the multicultural community but have a broader role in terms of the professional development of teachers and linguistic and cultural education.²⁵
- 5.31 This designation is reflected in the Commonwealth government's administration of community language programs—these programs are not within the remit of the Department of Education but within the Office for Multicultural Affairs of Home Affairs.²⁶
- 5.32 In contrast, community language schools are the responsibility of the education department in every state and territory, apart from Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.²⁷
- 5.33 Speaking on this split of responsibilities, the Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education at the University of Sydney stated that 'They are not cultural events; they are teaching places, and they should be under the federal Department of Education'.²⁸
- 5.34 The central theme relating to the community language sector and the formal education system was the need for a higher degree of integration and recognition of language skills gained in informal settings.
- 5.35 The idea of a 'language passport'—a portable certification of language skill—was presented as a mechanism to formally recognise language skill and proficiency and overcome disconnections between the formal and informal education systems.²⁹
- A language passport offers individuals with a portable record of their linguistic repertoire, formal qualifications, self-assessed proficiency, intercultural experience, and informal learning.³⁰
- 5.36 It is used to provide an objective standard and reference for language capability rather than being tied to a single language or examination system. As explained by the Australian Academy of the Humanities:

²⁵ Mr Abubaker, AFESA Community Languages Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, pp. 35–36; Dr, Secretary, AFESA Community Languages Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 35–36; Dr Ken Cruickshank, Professor Education and Languages, and Director, Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education (SICLE), University of Sydney, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 36.

²⁶ Department of Education (DoE), *Submission 191.2*, p. 13.

²⁷ Dr Cruickshank, SICLE, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 36.

²⁸ Dr Cruickshank, SICLE, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 36.

²⁹ Australian Academy of the Humanities (AAH), *Submission 64.3*, pp. 1–8; Dr Cruickshank, SICLE, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 37.

³⁰ AAH, *Submission 64.3*, pp. 1–8.

It remains arguably the largest coordinated international effort to construct empirically calibrated descriptors of language proficiency across multiple languages and national systems, which helps explain its rapid diffusion and adaptation well beyond Europe, though not in Australia.³¹

- 5.37 The Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education is trialling a language passport model, based on an existing model in use in Europe, with 20 community language schools in New South Wales to assess student fluency in the studied language. In the trial, teachers are being trained on how to assess their students.

Following the assessment, the student receives an e-passport. This can be shown to parents, community language schools, and to mainstream schools. It can be used to provide credit recognition for outside language study and to support teachers in knowing the level of language proficiency and the next steps for language progression.³²

- 5.38 In addition, in its submission and report to the Australian Government, 'Towards a National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia', the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), discussed the role and importance of community languages and mainstream education language instruction.

Its recommendations included the use of accredited curricula for Asian language programs in schools and community contexts, the development of a nationally coordinated process of curriculum development and accreditation for new languages, and a model for language learning which includes community languages.³³

Supporting community language teachers into Australian classrooms

- 5.39 Another element explored during the inquiry was the pathway for community language teachers to receive formal education qualifications and become accredited to teach in mainstream schools.
- 5.40 Around 80 per cent of teachers in community language schools have unrecognised tertiary qualifications from overseas, and only five per cent of teachers in community language schools are accredited mainstream teachers. Further, 80 per cent of community language school teachers want mainstream accreditation.³⁴
- 5.41 The RMIT Community Language Teacher Education Program highlighted the value of community language teachers and how supporting these teachers is valuable for the broader education system:

³¹ AAH, *Submission 64.3*, p. 1.

³² Dr Cruickshank, SICLE, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, pp. 37–38.

³³ Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA), *Submission 104*, pp. 1–17.

³⁴ Dr Cruickshank, SICLE, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 33–34.

... Community language teachers themselves bring very rich, often under-recognised, expertise that strengthens language education across Australia. Universities in this space play a very pivotal role in fostering this ecosystem by providing pathways from community language teaching into formal teaching qualifications, helping also to address the national teacher shortage and strengthening the broader [K to 12] system.³⁵

5.42 Partnerships between universities and community language schools are important in supporting and delivering pathways for community language teachers to receive formal education qualifications and commence teaching in Australian schools.

5.43 For example, Western Sydney University has piloted a program, with support from the Australian Government's High Achieving Teachers initiative, to develop primary and secondary school teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Participants receive a bursary of \$10,000 per year of study and are supported to take up opportunities for paid employment once they are conditionally accredited to teach. They also receive 12 credit points of advanced standing into the Master of Teaching qualification.³⁶

5.44 The RMIT Community Language Teacher Education Program also provides training and professional development for community language leaders and teachers. Each year, between 150 and 200 teachers and school leaders participate in its professional learning program across 47 languages (60 per cent of these courses are focused on Asian languages and cultures).³⁷

5.45 The pathway to accreditation is only one aspect of supporting community language teachers in Australia. These teachers often face challenges in adapting to Australian classrooms and need support in learning and understanding the context of the Australian approach to education. Ongoing support is needed for these teachers to see the pathway to mainstream accreditation and to succeed in Australian classrooms.

5.46 The Intensive Chinese Network (ICN) described these challenges:

Also, most of our teachers—in fact, I would argue 95 per cent of our Mandarin teachers in Australia—have not been through Australian schooling, so there are also intercultural challenges around their conceptualisation of a teacher's role in the classroom, how to handle behaviour management in class, how to explore your own culture from the other side of the bridge, and how to build that empathy so that it is about engagement first, not language first.³⁸

³⁵ Associate Professor Jing Qi, Program Manager, RMIT Community Language Teacher Education Program, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 31.

³⁶ Dr Cruickshank, SICLE, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, pp. 33–34; DoE, *Submission 191*, pp. 8–9.

³⁷ Associate Professor Qi, RMIT Community Language Teacher Education Program, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 31; RMIT Community Language Teacher Education Program, *Submission 150*, p. 1.

³⁸ Mr Stanley Wang, Convenor, ICN, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 22.

- 5.47 Box 5.1 details another example of the difficulties heritage language teachers can face once they enter an Australian classroom.

Box 5.1 Australian schools as culture shock

'I heard Mei Turnip, who's an outstanding Indonesian teacher—she's won an award from the Australia–Indonesia Institute—speak two days ago at the first congress for Indonesian language held in Australia—it's a landmark there, supported by the Indonesian Embassy—about how being a native speaker really wasn't enough. She said that, as she went into schools, she needed a lot of time to adjust and learn about language acquisition pedagogy and also to learn the Australian teaching environment. I think she talked about the viciousness of year 9 school students. I don't think she put it as viciousness. But, you know, that context is not something you can just drop someone into.

I think understanding the needs of teachers who might be coming from Indonesia is really important. There's a lot of contextual training that needs to happen but also a lot of respect that needs to be within that teacher training program. A lot of Indonesian teachers who come here, or people who would like to study here, are coming from a country of 280 million people where they're often the cream of the crop. They're very intelligent people. The number of times that I've seen teacher training programs fall flat because of frankly disrespectful approaches to those people—a lot of cultural misunderstanding—is really disappointing. There's a need for cultural contextual learning: What is an Australian teacher like? What are parents like here? A lot of Indonesians will come very underprepared for that if we don't have a robust program to help them learn that environment'.³⁹

Case study

- 5.48 In this section, a case study is presented on South Asian and Indian languages. It explores how community and other informal education providers are working together to bolster Asian language and cultural education in Australia.
- 5.49 The Committee was presented with evidence from many different language groups about the significance of their language to Australia and the role of community programs, business associations, and other programs that exist to create and foster language and cultural studies and relationships between Australia and the countries of Asia.
- 5.50 This case study has been chosen due to the breadth of evidence provided to the Committee and concerns for the lack of connection between informal and community language settings and Australian schools.

³⁹ Dr Zara Maxwell-Smith, *Committee Hansard*, 8 December 2025, p. 14.

South Asian and Indian languages – an increasingly unmet demand

- 5.51 In contrast to the broad decline in Asian language enrolments, the Committee heard that demand for South Asian languages, particularly Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Tamil and Telugu, is growing, driven by one of the fastest-growing parts of Australia's population.
- 5.52 Australians of Indian and wider South Asian heritage now form one of the largest and fastest-growing diaspora communities in the country, and many families want their children to maintain and formally study their heritage languages.
- 5.53 There is a clear gap in the provision of South Asian languages in the education system. Hindi is the only Indian sub-continental language listed in the Languages Learning Area of the Australian Curriculum.
- 5.54 The provision of South Asian languages varies across jurisdictions. Victoria allows senior secondary students to undertake Hindi, Punjabi and Tamil language courses, and New South Wales offers Tamil, Punjabi, and Bengali in a limited number of schools.⁴⁰
- 5.55 The disparity between the provision of South Asian languages in the formal education system and demand from the community was highlighted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT):
- South Asian languages remain almost entirely absent from educational offerings; a fact that has become increasingly stark as South Asian diaspora populations have grown. Although Punjabi is Australia's fastest growing foreign language, it is rarely offered in schools. This is also the case for other Indian subcontinent languages such as Hindi and Nepali.⁴¹
- 5.56 Much of the demand for South Asian languages is rooted in first and second-generation South Asian families wanting to pass their home languages on to the next generation.⁴² This demand is growing as more children of South Asian families reach school age.
- 5.57 Community language groups are working to meet this demand but face difficulties in delivering language education that is aligned to community interest and that matches the expectations and requirements of the curriculum in mainstream schools.

⁴⁰ ACARA, *Submission 52*, p. 1; Ms Shane Samuelson, Acting First Assistant Secretary Policy, DoE, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2025, p. 2; Kristien Sarwo Rini, *Submission 144*, pp. 1–6; Mrs Navaneetha Krishnan, SIC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 10.

⁴¹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Submission 145*, p. 2.

⁴² Ms Jasmine Batra, Managing Director, Arrow Digital, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 8; South Asian Studies Association of Australia (SASAA), *Submission 97*, p. 2; Mrs Navaneetha Krishnan, SIC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 9.

- 5.58 This represents a significant opportunity. Unlike languages whose programs must be rebuilt from a low base of student interest, South Asian languages enjoy strong and growing community demand that the school system could harness if it chose to.
- 5.59 With leadership from state and territory education systems, and modest investment in curriculum resources, teacher supply and credit pathways, that latent demand could be converted into one of the more sustainable sources of Asia capability in the country.
- 5.60 For example, the South Asian Studies Association of Australia (SASAA) stated that 'Since there are attempts to meet the demand for South Asian language instruction in community settings, this suggests that there is an unmet demand in school and University curricula'.⁴³

The SASAA also discussed how Australians from South Asian backgrounds represent a potential resource in language instruction and that Australia can expect significant shifts in educational demand as second and third generations of Australians from South Asian backgrounds move into tertiary settings eager to learn more of the wider South Asian experience.⁴⁴

- 5.61 Similarly, the ANU South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub told the Committee that:

...there's an extensive array of community-run language schools currently, especially for South Asian languages. However, in formal schooling systems, there has mainly been a prioritisation or exclusive offering of European languages and a limited offering of South Asian languages.⁴⁵

- 5.62 Formal recognition in the school curriculum was discussed as central to improve enrolments in the school system. For example, the South Indian Community said that:

Parents won't think of sending kids for an Asian language out of their own interest, but if it's a subject in the school or if it's valued in the curriculum, people will show more interest.⁴⁶

- 5.63 Mr Navaneetha Krishnan spoke of how the limited recognition of languages in the curriculum causes difficulty for language learning:

As someone who did undertake VCE three years ago ... there wasn't enough recognition for Tamil. I wasn't able to take it as a subject ... If you do go the private route, obviously, they charge you a lot of money ... They make it quite difficult to access it.⁴⁷

⁴³ South Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ SASAA, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Mr Shaneeq Syed, Undergraduate Researcher, ANU South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Mrs Navaneetha Krishnan, SIC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 10.

⁴⁷ Mr Navaneetha Krishnan, SIC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 10.

- 5.64 Box 5.2 provides one such example and explores the role of the South Indian Community in delivering language education in Victoria.

Box 5.2 South Indian Community - Tamil language in Victoria

The South Indian Community (SIC) is a non-profit South Indian cultural organisation which represents over 400 families in Melbourne's western suburbs. It facilitates language programs, cultural education and community engagement initiatives.

The SIC is one of many community groups which play an important role in providing Tamil language instruction. These groups face difficulties in aligning the language instruction they provide with the content required in the Victorian curriculum.

The SIC told the Committee that many communities run private Tamil lessons which don't necessarily follow the Victorian curriculum and that an unstructured program is taught most of the time. The SIC has created its own teaching resources and materials for Tamil based on the Victorian curriculum.

For other languages, such as Telugu and Malayalam, there are no resources – such as books or a recognised curriculum for community language schools even though these languages are taught through the Victorian School of Languages. Community language teachers create their own syllabus based on training sessions they attend.

The SIC incorporates elements of the school curriculum into their Tamil language classes. This process involves assessing the students' current language skills, checking what they are learning in other classes, and interactive models of language instruction, such as through playing traditional games and other play-based activities. This supports students to learn Tamil and succeed in the final exams for mainstream schools.

The SIC discussed how parents are frustrated at the lack of resources and curriculum for these languages and called for the government to recognise the role of community language groups.⁴⁸

- 5.65 The difficulties experienced in the provision of South Asian languages continues into the tertiary education sector. La Trobe University and the Australian National University (ANU) are the only universities in Australia that offer any degree program in a modern South Asian language (ANU offers Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu and La Trobe offers Hindi).

Sanskrit is offered at the University of Sydney with some units requiring online cross-institutional study at the ANU.⁴⁹ The ANU is also the only Australian university to offer in-person teaching of Hindi.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ SIC, Submission 189, pp. 1–3; Mr Navaneetha Krishnan, SIC, and Mrs Navaneetha Krishnan, SIC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, pp. 9–12.

⁴⁹ SASAA, Submission 97, p. 1; AAH, Submission 64, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Dr Ian Woolford, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 13; Dr Christopher Diamond, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 16; Professor Michele Ford, Submission 78, p.

5.66 The South Asian Studies Association of Australia explained that ‘there were key global experts on South Asian studies at every major university in the 1990s’ and that when these experts retired, they were by and large not replaced.⁵¹

5.67 Dr Christopher Diamond, a senior lecturer in Hindi language at the ANU, also discussed the poor architecture for South Asian studies in Australia:

... there is a broken pipeline for developing sovereign capability for Asian studies in general, but for South Asian studies it was a pipeline that wasn’t really built. The current academics teaching South Asian languages at our universities ... have been recruited from abroad. This is because Australia has not produced its own South Asian experts in any meaningful numbers. We rely on foreign universities and governments for the support for these programs.⁵²

He further explained that South Asian academics often teach to maximum capacity, leading to little opportunity to train and foster the next generation of South Asian academics and lecturers.⁵³

5.68 The SASAA also noted despite the high levels of community engagement this has not filtered through to the tertiary education system and stated that:

There is an awful lot of community-level language learning and cultural learning going on. Is there a way that that can be extended into the tertiary sector? We don’t really have the mechanisms, I don’t think.⁵⁴

5.69 Additionally, many academics with a background in South Asian studies and languages are teaching into programs where that expertise is diluted, such as in history or international relations.⁵⁵

5.70 There is a clear disconnect between the formal education structures and the provision of South Asian and Indian languages in Australia. Community language programs are filling the gaps and meeting the demand for language instruction.

Committee comment

5.71 The Committee regards Australia’s diaspora communities as an important source of latent Asia capability that Australia’s institutions have all too often failed to recognise. But recognising that asset is the beginning of the task, not the end of it.

1; Dr Elly Kent, Deputy Director, Languages, School of Culture, History and Language, Australian National University, College of Asia and the Pacific, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 22.

⁵¹ Dr Adam Bowles, President, SASAA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 3.

⁵² Dr Diamond, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 14.

⁵³ Dr Diamond, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Dr Adam Bowles, SASAA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ SASAA, *Submission 97*, p. 2.

- 5.72 Given formal pathways, recognition of prior learning and continuity of study, Australia's Asian diaspora communities can be important drivers of Australia's Asia capability.
- 5.73 Heritage and community language programs are playing an essential role in delivering languages and cultural education in Australia and are often filling a gap that has been left by the formal education system. They are highly valued by Australian diaspora communities.
- 5.74 Languages are being taught to many thousands of Australian students outside of mainstream classrooms and yet this work is not being recognised by the education system.
- 5.75 The Committee was concerned to hear that heritage and non-heritage language students, who make great efforts to learn an Asian language outside of regular school hours and on weekends, are deterred from continuing language studies in the mainstream classroom.
- 5.76 Many factors play into the current situation, but the main deterrents are the lack of connection between what is taught in community language settings and the formal classroom as well as the lack of recognition of language skill and aptitude that many heritage and non-heritage language speakers possess.
- 5.77 The formal education system needs to provide for recognition of language capability gained outside the classroom and support students to achieve advanced language skills. At present, students are penalised for their efforts outside the classroom and do not see themselves represented in the school curriculum.
- 5.78 There is more work to be done to align the curriculum between community language schools and the formal languages curriculum in each state and territory. Many community language groups are responsible for designing and implementing their own language curriculum and resources and trying to align this to what is taught in schools.
- 5.79 The Committee commends those in the community languages sector for this important work and recognises the effort and commitment of community language teachers in imparting their knowledge of language and culture. Community language teachers deserve support and resources to ensure that there is alignment and clear pathways between what is taught outside of the classroom and what is taught in mainstream schools.
- 5.80 The Committee heard the calls for the government to recognise heritage language and non-heritage language skills gained outside the classroom. One mechanism to enable this recognition would be to implement a languages passport to allow students to track their language capabilities and show educators their skills.
- 5.81 A languages passport is already in place in Europe as part of a suite of programs and initiatives of the overall European Language Passport.

- 5.82 A languages passport or similar would play an important role in not only providing evidence of a student's achievement and progression in a language but in signalling that languages can be learned to a high standard outside of what is prescribed in the school curriculum.

Recommendation 27

- 5.83 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establishes a National Community Languages Curriculum Alignment program to support and enable the alignment of school based and community-based language curriculum.**

In developing the National Community Languages Curriculum Alignment program, consideration should be given to:

- **Creating a formal recognition framework for heritage language learning.**
- **Developing pathways between heritage and community language programs to school-based education.**

Recommendation 28

- 5.84 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government develop a National Languages Digital Passport project to provide students with recognition of language progression and attainment.**

The National Languages Passport project should track:

- **Speaking, listening, reading, and writing proficiency against national benchmarks, and**
- **Accredited study and immersion hours across community language schools and other immersive language settings.**

- 5.85 Community language and heritage language teachers are often a bridge between formal language and cultural study and bring the study of a culture and language to life for students.
- 5.86 Many community and heritage language teachers want to teach in mainstream Australian schools but often struggle to see a pathway. Once they enter Australian schools, they face additional barriers in understanding Australian cultural norms and the behavioural expectations within classrooms.
- 5.87 In a period of severe teacher shortages, community and heritage language teachers should be supported to become qualified teachers in Australia and be given the resources and support to succeed in Australian classrooms.

Recommendation 29

- 5.88 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government in collaboration with the relevant state and territory bodies provide expedited pathways and opportunities for community and heritage language teachers to become qualified teachers in Australia.**

The Australian Government should also provide resources and cultural training about Australia for foreign national teachers to support their transition into classrooms.

- 5.89 The Committee was pleased to learn about the efforts in the community and the support of various governments in the teaching of South Asian and Indian languages. The languages of these regions and countries are incredibly important to Australia, but the education system is failing to deliver the language and cultural studies that young people need to successfully understand and engage with these languages and cultures.
- 5.90 There is demand for these languages and it has shifted away from the mainstream classroom to the informal community-based language education sector. The Committee heard of many excellent programs within the community and across governments to support the provision of language and cultural training. This is often occurring in silos and can be disconnected from the education system.
- 5.91 To support the current crop of language and cultural studies teachers, urgent action and intervention is required. Otherwise, Australia is at risk of losing these capabilities for good.

Recommendation 30

- 5.92 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in collaboration with the states and territories, fund and invest in South Asian language curriculum resources for schools and community languages.**



6. Where does Asia capability lead?

- 6.1 Asia capability is key to Australia being able to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities in Asia, manage national security interests in the region, and strengthen ties between people and institutions.¹ The education system plays a critical role in preparing graduates to enter the workforce with the skills and capabilities needed to successfully engage with the Asian region.
- 6.2 This chapter examines the Asia capabilities needed in private industry and the public sector and the importance of building these skills early in the education. It explores the disconnect between the education system, career pathways, and Australia's strategic interests in the region.

An Asia capable Australian workforce

- 6.3 In an increasingly dynamic geopolitical landscape, Australia's leaders in government, diplomacy, business, and culture must possess the skills and capabilities needed to pursue and prosper in the Asian region.² As explained by the Business Council of Australia (BCA):
- ... Australian companies require a workforce that is sophisticated in understanding the politics, the opportunities, the economics and the know-how, armed with cultural intelligence on how to get business done in that particular region.³
- 6.4 Asia's prominence will continue to rise and despite efforts to ensure students are exposed to Asia and build Asia capability, the education system is not producing the intended outcomes.

¹ See, for example: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Submission 145*, p. 2; Professor Heather Sharon Zwicker, Executive Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, The University of Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, pp. 3–4; Professor Kate Darian-Smith, President, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA), *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 2; Mr Richard McGregor, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 22; Professor Hugh White, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 45.

² Asialink, *Submission 129*, p. 1.

³ Mr Antony Shaw, Chair, Global Engagement Program, Business Council of Australia (BCA), *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 1.

- 6.5 The University of Queensland explained the need for Australia to produce Asia capability from within the education system:

Asia capability is not simply an educational aspiration; it's a sovereign capability essential to Australia's security, prosperity and diplomatic influence in the region that will most influence our future. Yet, by every measure imaginable, we are becoming less capable rather than more.⁴

- 6.6 Asia is a complex operating environment, with diverse political systems, regulatory regimes, business cultures, and languages.⁵ An Asia capable workforce across all industries and experience levels is essential to effectively engaging with the region.⁶

What capabilities does Australia's workforce need?

- 6.7 The inquiry examined the types of skills and capabilities needed within the Australian workforce to respond to and engage with the Asian region.⁷ As outlined in Chapter one, Asia capability encompasses generalist and specialist skill sets.

- 6.8 Generalist and specialist capabilities bring different and complementary qualities to the Australian workforce in both the public and private sectors. Generalist Asia capability was described as important for long-term business resilience and performance, enabling organisations to engage with the region with greater confidence and cultivate more productive cross-cultural working relationships.⁸

- 6.9 Employees with generalist Asia capability can navigate diverse social norms, business etiquette, and communication styles.⁹ They are also able to interpret and explain the impacts of regional or geopolitical shocks in Asia and Australia and inform business strategy for both domestic and international markets.¹⁰

- 6.10 Specialist capability was highlighted as necessary for businesses to operate effectively within specific countries and markets, particularly for organisations seeking a deeper engagement with economic partners.¹¹

Specialist knowledge is essential in enabling Australian businesses to identify who to partner with, where they fit within broader regional dynamics, and how to communicate value across cultural differences.¹²

⁴ Professor Zwicker, The University of Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 10.

⁵ Australian Industry Group (AIG), *Submission 89*, p. 4; Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 1.

⁶ See, for example: AIG, *Submission 89*, p. 4; Mr Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 1; Ms Rachel Thompson, Chief Executive Officer, Asialink, *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, p. 6.

⁷ See, for example: AIG, *Submission 89*, p. 4; DFAT, *Submission 145*, p. 1-2; Business Council of Australia (BCA), *Submission 165*, p. 1.

⁸ Australia China Business Council (ACBC), *Submission 74.1*, p. 3; Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 6.

⁹ Australia-India Innovation Corridor (AIIC), *Submission 81.1*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 6.

¹¹ Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 6; ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 3.

¹² Mrs Sharbani Dhar, Co-founder and Director, AIIC, *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, p. 10.

- 6.11 Deep specialisation often takes years to develop through a combination of tertiary education and professional experience.¹³
- 6.12 This is particularly the case for language proficiency. Although not the only component required for Asia capability, language proficiency was identified as necessary for building professional relationships and operating within Asian markets.¹⁴ Business negotiations and collaborations can occur in English; however, this is not sufficient to develop deep professional relationships or industry understanding.
- 6.13 Mr Richard McGregor discussed the value of having Asian language skills and the benefits these skills bring:
- ...without the language, you cannot talk informally to so many people in country, and people can't talk to you. As somebody who worked in Japan and China for about 20 years and worked very hard to lift my language skills, informal contexts are invaluable—that's not to say in China especially but certainly in China, where the formal conversations are not open and frank. Also, there's value in reading what's around you on political wall posters and graffiti. Finally, learning a foreign language is a sign of fundamental respect for your interlocutor—friend or foe alike.¹⁵
- 6.14 Without Asia capabilities, businesses are unprepared to take advantage of economic opportunities but also can be blind to the risks that presents in the region and the risks of not having an Asia capable workforce.
- 6.15 For example, Arrow Digital told the Committee about the lost opportunities when Australian businesses lack an understanding of Asian cultural practices:
- Through my accelerator program, the Big LEAP, I've helped Australian and Indian founders and start-ups scale across the border. I've seen first-hand, when it comes to Asia capability, that language is only part of the puzzle. Deals are won or lost on culture. Here is a real life example, I was leading a delegation of Australian tech founders to India. As we walked into this boardroom for a meeting in Bangalore with senior government officials, one of the founders just walked up and inadvertently sat at the head of the table, unaware that, in that context, hierarchy decides where you sit. It signalled ignorance of the cultural setting that he was hoping to build business in.¹⁶

¹³ AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 4.

¹⁴ See, for example, Dr Ian Woolford, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2026, p. 15; Major General Martin White, Commander, Australian Defence College, Department of Defence (Defence), *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 2; Dr Adam Bowles, President, South Asian Studies Association of Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 7; Ms Thompson, Asialink, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 2.

¹⁵ Mr McGregor, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 18 March 2026, p. 17.

¹⁶ Ms Jasmine Batra, Managing Director, Arrow Digital, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 3.

6.16 Similarly the Australia-Korea Business Council said:

In fact, Korea is an interesting market; they won't mark you down for not taking the steps to understand Korean culture, but it's a very relationship and trust based culture. If you can take just a few steps to learn a few phrases or a little bit about Korea's history and say that back to the Koreans, that will go a considerably long way in terms of building that relationship and that trust. For me with my language skills, all I need to say is a few sentences in Korean and, more often than not, the Korean counterpart will fall over backwards. That just helps me build that level of trust and that relationship to a deeper level.¹⁷

6.17 In discussing how to build these capabilities the Australia-India Innovation Corridor (AIIC) told the Committee that thought needs to be given to why Asia has built Western capability organically over the generations and how Asia's push for Western capabilities have become successful. She explained, in the context of India, that developing these skills, such as learning English, is not an either-or choice. AIIC further stated that:

...But understanding why that has happened so organically is super important. What has happened is the language capability, whether it is a cultural adoption of Hollywood movies, pop music from Western culture, all of those things or understanding and having global ambitions of building global innovative businesses—they're all ultimately tied to something that is important for all of us, and that is our economic outcomes. So, even as individuals, it's important for us to understand why people have taken that pathway to pick up on these Western capabilities quicker than the others.¹⁸

6.18 To successfully engage with Asia, businesses need to adopt a 'portfolio approach' to Asia capability: one that combines broad generalist capability across the organisation with select specialist capability.¹⁹ Australian businesses need a mix of generalist and specialist Asia capability, depending on their specific industry and investment plans.²⁰

Do we have an Asia capable workforce?

6.19 Despite the recognised importance of Asia capability for Australia's businesses and economy, the inquiry revealed substantial gaps in Australian businesses' Asia capability. Australia's current workforce is drawing down an ageing stock of Asia capability and failing to replace it.²¹

¹⁷ Mrs Elizabeth Griffin, Chief Executive Officer, Australia-Korea Business Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 12.

¹⁸ Mrs Dhar, AIIC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 13.

¹⁹ AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 4.

²⁰ Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 5.

²¹ Ms Thompson, Asialink, *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, p. 2.

- 6.20 Although data on Asia capability across Australian businesses and industry leaders remains limited, several submissions pointed to evidence that Australian businesses are facing significant capability gaps in navigating the complexities of the Asian region.²²
- 6.21 In 2012, the Australian Government committed to ensuring one-third of top Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) 200 board members possessed deep Asia experience and knowledge, but this has not been achieved.²³
- 6.22 Asia capability is increasingly concentrated in a small number of businesses and individuals. As a result, most Australian businesses ‘remain underprepared to engage with Asia as a complex, dynamic operating environment’.²⁴
- 6.23 A 2017 Asialink study assessed Asia capabilities amongst ASX 200 companies. It assessed Asia capabilities across six critical dimensions and found that these boards averaged 6.42 out of 30 possible points for Asia capability. Senior executive teams averaged just 3.79 out of 30 points.²⁵
- 6.24 Similar research by Asialink Business in 2020 found that only seven per cent of board members and senior executives of the ASX 200 were ‘sufficiently Asia capable’. Senior business leaders frequently had strong knowledge of Asian markets but underperformed in adapting to Asian cultural contexts.²⁶
- 6.25 Ms Danielle Rajendram, Director, Advisory and Insights, Asialink Business discussed the role of Asia capability in the business context and told the Committee:
- Asia capability in a business context is about much more than just building language skills. Businesses need to develop familiarity with Asian markets. They need personal relationships in the region. They need cultural understanding and the agility to adapt their products and services to Asian consumers and conditions. Too often, Australian businesses are not investing in building these capabilities. They tend to be domestically focused, risk averse and put off by public discourse, which focuses too much on the challenges of operating in Asia.²⁷
- 6.26 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) also articulated the need for ‘greater literacy in leadership and senior executive roles in Australia’.²⁸

²² See for example, AIG, *Submission 89*, pp. 4-5; BCA, *Submission 165*, p. 2; Mr Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, pp. 1-2; Mr Tom Parker, National Chief Executive Officer, Australia China Business Council (ACBC), *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, p. 9.

²³ AIG, *Submission 89*, p. 5.

²⁴ Mr Parker, ACBC, *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, p. 9.

²⁵ AIG, *Submission 89*, p. 4.

²⁶ BCA, *Submission 165*, p. 2.

²⁷ Ms Danielle Rajendram, Director, Advisory and Insights, Asialink Business, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 3.

²⁸ DFAT, *Submission 145*, p. 3.

- 6.27 Evidence received throughout the inquiry highlighted the risks to Australian businesses and economic growth that may result from being underprepared to engage with Asia, including risks for productivity, supply chains and long-term competitiveness.²⁹
- 6.28 There were competing views on whether there is a shortage of Asia capable staff. Some inquiry participants argued that there is a structural shortage of Asia capable staff in Australia, whereas others viewed the problem as a mismatch of supply and demand and of placements in Asia focused roles.³⁰
- 6.29 AIIC stated that there is a shortage of Asia capable staff and that it is the result of decades of underinvestment in Asia-facing education and a recruitment culture that 'has never systematically valued or measure Asia capability as a professional credential'. The AIIC further said that the 'shortage manifests not as an absence of people, but as an absence of the right kind of knowledge'.³¹
- 6.30 Conversely, the Australia China Business Council (ACBC) did not agree that there is a shortage of Asia capable staff but rather a 'significant and demonstrable shortfall in the applied Asia capability across the Australian economy'. Many individuals with relevant expertise are not placed in roles where their skills can be utilised, and the expertise they hold is frequently unrecognised or undervalued by employers and institutions.³² The ACBC also highlighted that:
- Australia has invested heavily in the supply of Asia Capability through language programs, scholarships and other initiatives which have produced individual subject matter specialist expertise. However, demand from businesses, boards, agencies and institutions remains limited, reflecting the broader population's low baseline understanding of Asia.³³
- 6.31 There are clearly gaps in Australia's current state of Asia capabilities and how Asia capable staff are participating in the workforce that need to be addressed. As highlighted by the ACBC: 'Australia's Asia capability is not where it needs to be, and this is now an economic issue, not just an educational one.'³⁴
- 6.32 There are a range of organisations building Asia capability internally and supporting the development of Asian language and cultural skills across the private and public sectors. Box 6.1 provides a case study on Asialink and the role of the federal government in supporting the development of this critical capability.

²⁹ See for example: Mr Parker, ACBC, *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, p. 9; Mr Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 7.

³⁰ See for example, ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 1; AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 1; Mr Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 3.

³¹ AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 1.

³² ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 1.

³³ ACBC, *Submission 74*, p. 8.

³⁴ Mr Parker, ABCB, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 9.

Box 6.1 Case study – Asialink

Asialink is Australia's national centre for engagement with Asia. It develops Asia capabilities across arts and culture, business, diplomacy and education. Asialink offers a range of programs and initiatives for capability development.

It is a non-academic department hosted within the University of Melbourne and was established in 1990 as a joint initiative of the Australian Government, the University of Melbourne, and the Myer Foundation.³⁵

Asialink Business

Asialink Business was established in 2013 as Australia's National Centre for Asia Capability and is funded through ongoing multi-year grants from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

Asialink Business has reached nearly 120,000 individuals and has gained valuable insights into what both builds and sustains Asia capability at scale.

Its most successful programs of work focus on identifying, sharing and connecting examples of successful business engagement and combine awareness-raising activities with knowledge building and the development of practical skills.³⁶

Recently, Austrade has partnered with Asialink business to upskill businesses through targeted learning programmes for Asian market engagement, knowledge building, and developing a broader ecosystem of partner networks.

These initiatives provide a foundation of building Asia capability but requires expansion to a whole of government approach.³⁷

Funding models

Asialink has a diverse funding model and each arm of its operations receives funding from various sources.

For example, Asialink Education received government funding from the Department of Education for the first 23 years of its operation, funding that ceased in 2015. Since then, its reliance on a fee-for-service model has significantly reduced its ability to sustain and grow Asia literacy across Australia.

In contrast, Asialink Business is funded by ongoing multi-year grants from the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, a model which has enabled it to successfully scale and build Asia capabilities within the Australian workforce, reaching close to 120,000 individuals since its establishment in 2013.³⁸

³⁵ Asialink, *Submission 129*, p. 1; Asialink, *About us*, <https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/about/> (accessed 11 June 2026).

³⁶ Ms Rajendram, Asialink Business, *Committee Hansard*, 5 November 2025, p. 3.

³⁷ AIG, *Submission 89*, p. 5.

³⁸ Asialink, *Submission 129*, p. 5.

- 6.33 To gain a better understanding of the current workforce capabilities, many submitters called for a comprehensive assessment of Asia capability needs across the Australian workforce.³⁹ Such an assessment would identify key gaps and opportunities for policy improvement informed by robust, accurate data rather than assumptions.⁴⁰ It would also result in clear strategies aimed at 'uplifting and better integrating existing institutions and their efforts' in the Asia capability space.⁴¹

From the classroom to the boardroom

- 6.34 Despite Asia's strategic and economic importance to Australia, there is little evidence of demand for Asia capable graduates from Australian employers.⁴² Instead, 'employer demand signals and utilisation [of Asia capability] in the labour market remain inconsistent.'⁴³

- 6.35 Asia capable graduates are not seeing the pathway from their degrees into meaningful careers in Asia and several inquiry participants highlighted that job advertisements rarely specify Asia capability as a requirement.⁴⁴

- 6.36 Ms Racheline Tantular discussed her experience of studying Asia and the lack of connection she saw from industry to launch her skills and expertise into a career:

Even with all of this interest in Asia and Asian languages, my initial study and career plan did not include Asia at all, because I wasn't aware of how this interest could translate into a career. I started at UWA studying medical sciences and music. It was only through getting involved in the ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership and the Australia China Youth Association that I began to see pathways and opportunities for Asia related careers and decided to switch to Asian studies...⁴⁵

- 6.37 A similar sentiment was echoed by Ms Mikaylie Page when she spoke about her experiences in navigating employment opportunities and career progression. She said that it was 'really difficult' when she first left university to capitalise on her Asia capabilities and how to sell these skills to prospective employers. As Ms Page has progressed in her career she has been able to find opportunities that allows her to work across Asia and stated that:

³⁹ See for example: Asia Society Australia, *Submission 79*, p. 1; Mr Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 1; Ms Thompson, Asialink, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Mr Antony Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 1.

⁴¹ Ms Thompson, Asialink, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 5.

⁴² See, for example, Asialink Leaders Program, *Submission 94*, p. 2; National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board, *Submission 112*, p. 4; Westpac Scholars Trust and the University of Tasmania, *Submission 121*, p. 6; Ms Racheline Tantular, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard* 14 April 2026, p. 22.

⁴³ Westpac Scholars Trust and the University of Tasmania, *Submission 121*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ See, for example, AIIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 3; Westpac Scholars Trust and the University of Tasmania, *Submission 121*, p. 6; Ms Tantular, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Ms Tantular, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 19.

I think finding ways to market those is really hard because, as an early career professional, you might have the language skills or the networks, but you don't necessarily have the technical skills that go alongside that. And that can be quite difficult to market. But, as I've moved through my work, finding ways to talk about what I can do and the importance of soft skills in those markets is becoming more and more recognised. So I think being able to market the Asia capability is something that's tied not necessarily to your ability to do the technical work but to your ability to navigate those markets—for example, with investors looking at ways to understand a market versus, necessarily, doing the technical legal work.⁴⁶

- 6.38 This lack of demand sends a signal to graduates that employers do not value an understanding of or expertise in Asia. In turn, there is a risk that this lack of demand further disincentives students from studying Asian language and culture throughout schooling and university study, as there is no clear pathway to employment.⁴⁷

Theoretical foundations v practical application

- 6.39 Submissions noted the disconnect between the academic preparation of graduates and the applied capability requirements of industry.⁴⁸ The gap further disrupts the pathway between education and employment for Asia capable graduates, and in turn limits the effectiveness of Australia's professional Asia capability.⁴⁹
- 6.40 Universities do a good job of providing strong theoretical and analytical foundations and linguistic capability, however, they often do not equip graduates with the 'applied business experience necessary to deploy their knowledge effectively in real-world operating environments'.⁵⁰
- 6.41 This creates challenges for employers, who may struggle to retain Asia capable graduates if they are not adequately equipped to apply their expertise within commercial settings. While offering internships or graduate pathways may identify potential talent, if this does not result in long-term employment it benefits neither the graduate nor the employer.⁵¹
- 6.42 Industry organisations stressed the importance of stronger, more structured collaboration between universities, industry, and business organisations to reinforce the training and pathways necessary to develop Asia capable graduates into an Asia capable workforce.⁵²

⁴⁶ Ms Mikaylie Page, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 21.

⁴⁷ National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board, *Submission 112*, pp. 4-5; Ms Tantular, Private capacity, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 22.

⁴⁸ See, for example, ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 6; AIIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 12.

⁴⁹ ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 6.

⁵¹ ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 6.

⁵² ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 7; AIIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 12; Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 13; Mr Anthony Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 3.

- 6.43 In particular, the ACBC highlighted the importance of industry-integrated learning models and practical work placements, including exposure to commercial practices and targeted professional training. They noted the important role industry bodies could play in facilitating ‘the translation of academic capability into applied capability’, to ensure a better outcome for both graduates and industry.⁵³
- 6.44 The lack of clear messaging to graduates about the value of Asia capability, and failure to set out clear pathways to employment, risks further disrupting the demand for Asian language and cultural education from students at schools as universities.
- 6.45 As explained by the BCA: ‘You create experts through the education process, but, if they don’t have a pathway into business or careers, then we are going to have a problem.’⁵⁴

A hybrid model for building Asia capability

- 6.46 There was discussion regarding the hiring of Asia capable graduates and the requirements of in-house and on the job training to meet the skill demands of businesses. Several business associations reinforced the value of a ‘hybrid’ approach to developing workforce Asia capability, combining both deliberate recruitment of Asia capable staff and providing in-house training to further develop capability across organisations.⁵⁵
- 6.47 Hiring Asia-capable staff provides organisations immediate access to language fluency and cultural knowledge.⁵⁶ Particularly outside of entry-level roles, Asia-capable individuals typically also bring experience, professional networks, in-market experience, and first-hand understanding of cultural dynamics and regulatory and business environments.⁵⁷
- 6.48 However, without internal commitment and leadership, ‘the impact of those individuals will be constrained.’⁵⁸ As explained by the AIIC, ‘without a broader organisational capability to support and absorb what these individuals bring, knowledge becomes siloed.’⁵⁹
- 6.49 In-house training offers the ability to build awareness and alignment broadly across an organisation.⁶⁰ It was noted that this training often only produces a surface-level familiarity with Asia and requires a high level of leadership to effectively implement and operationalise.⁶¹

⁵³ ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Mr Shaw, BCA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 2.

⁵⁵ ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, pp. 4–5; AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, pp. 5–6; Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 7.

⁵⁷ AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 5; ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ ACBC, *Submission 74.1*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ ACBC, *Supplementary Submission 74.1*, p. 4; Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 7.

⁶¹ AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 6; Asialink, *Submission 129.1*, p. 7.

- 6.50 The Asialink Leaders Program 2025 alumni survey found that while 98 per cent of respondents considered Asia capability ‘very important to Australia’s future success’ and 86 per cent considered it important or very important to their own organisation, 66 per cent reported that their organisation’s investment in Asia capability remains ‘low’ or ‘medium’.⁶²
- 6.51 The AIIC noted that the most effective model for building Asia capability combines hiring Asia capable graduates, embedding capability transfer, and experiential led training where staff can engage with live markets and co-creation with Asian markets.⁶³
- 6.52 The major theme that emerged was that hiring Asia capable graduates is an important step but this is not the final piece of the puzzle. Those staff need to be empowered to engage in Asia facing roles and utilise their skills and expertise, and businesses need to invest in professional learning and development of their staff.

The Australian Government as an employer

- 6.53 The Australian Government has a direct interest in developing an Asia capable workforce to meet the national interests of Australia. It also has a role in serving as a model employer and signalling the demand for Asia capability to the future workforce.
- 6.54 Building the capability to work effectively in Asia is a longstanding priority for the Australian Public Service (APS) across successive governments. The *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* and the *Independent Review of the Australian Public Service* (the Thodey Review) identified Asia capability as a critical skill set for the APS.⁶⁴
- 6.55 The APS Capability Reinvestment Fund (CRF) most recently identified ‘developing deeper knowledge and networks in Asia and the Pacific’ as one the ‘highest priority capability areas’ for the APS.⁶⁵

Through the CRF ten projects involving 14 APS agencies shared Round 1 funding of \$8.4 million, with some of these projects targeted at deepening knowledge and networks in Asia.⁶⁶

⁶² Asialink Leaders Program, *Submission 94*, p.2.

⁶³ AIIC, *Submission 81.1*, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Dr Rachel Bacon, Deputy Commissioner, Australian Public Service Commission (APSC), *Committee Hansard*, 11 March 2026, pp. 1, 3.

⁶⁵ APSC, *APS Capability Reinvestment Fund*, <https://www.apsc.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/workforce-information/research-analysis-and-publications/state-service/state-service-report-2023/operating-context/aps-capability-reinvestment-fund> (accessed 11 May 2026).

⁶⁶ APSC, *Capability Reinvestment Fund*, <https://www.apsc.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/workforce-information/research-analysis-and-publications/state-service/state-service-report-2023-24/capability-and-leadership/capability-reinvestment-fund>, accessed (11 May 2026).

- 6.56 The development of Asia and the Pacific capability was also identified as a priority area for the APS Reform Agenda. Several initiatives were trialled across the APS to ‘establish Asia and the Pacific capability’. These initiatives included an APS Indo-Pacific Executive Development Program, a post-graduate micro-credential in Pacific Engagement, and additional learning resources through APS Academy and the Diplomatic Academy.

To date, 129 people have completed the Indo-Pacific program; the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) did not provide details on enrolment or completions for the Pacific Cultural Capability Micro-credential.

- 6.57 According to the 2025 Annual Progress Report on the APS Reform Agenda, the goal to ‘Establish Asia and the Pacific capability’ is ‘complete’.⁶⁷ The APSC noted that ‘the completion of this initiative does not suggest that the underlying [Asia] capability requirement has been fully addressed’ within the public service.⁶⁸
- 6.58 Asia capability is important for the whole of the public service and not only for the typically outward facing agencies such as DFAT, Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) and Department of Defence (Defence).⁶⁹
- 6.59 This message was consistent across the government departments. Home Affairs noted that:

Asian language and cultural capability contributes to the Australian Public Service’s ability to build trust, communicate effectively, and engage credibly with regional partners by understanding local norms, priorities, and decision-making contexts. This capability strengthens Australia’s relationships by supporting informed policy development and engagement within the region.⁷⁰

- 6.60 Defence stated that ‘building Asia capability is fundamental to Australia’s national defence strategy’ and recognised the importance of high levels of cultural, linguistic and people-to-people understanding of Asia and Asian securities institutions.⁷¹
- 6.61 Defence stressed the need for Asia capable individuals to develop longstanding relationships and trust within the region. They stated that ‘...you cannot surge trust. That is something that you have to establish over a long period of time.’⁷²
- 6.62 Despite these statements, submissions and witness testimony revealed a disconnect between this articulated prioritisation and policies, strategies, and data collection to track and increase Asia capability within the APS.

⁶⁷ APSC, *Submission 194*, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁸ APSC, *Submission 194*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Dr Bacon, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 March 2026, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), *Submission 109.2*, p. 2.

⁷¹ Major General White, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 5.

⁷² Major General White, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, p. 8.

How do we know if we have an Asia capable APS?

- 6.63 There is little data available on the current number of Asia-capable employees across the Australian public service. At whole of system level, the APSC does not benchmark Asia capabilities within the APS and 'there is no APS goal or target for developing Asia capability'.⁷³
- 6.64 Further, the APSC does not collect information on the:
- current level of Asia capability within the APS
 - trends in graduates entering the APS in the past ten years in relation to Asian language and cultural skills, or
 - trends in the development of Asia capabilities within the APS over the past ten years.⁷⁴
- 6.65 The APSC has undertaken work to identify the skills required to improve Asia capability. This occurred as a part of the APS Reform Agenda to 'Establish Asia and the Pacific Capability'. While not a whole of service position, the work was informed by broad consultation across the APS. The analysis found a combination of technical, cultural and engagement capabilities as critical skills, including:
- A deep understanding of the historical, political, economic and strategic context of the region.
 - Greater expertise in areas that impact the region such as disaster response, climate change, food security, energy security, supply chain knowledge, public health, and digital transformation.
 - Cultural capability and the ability to work effectively across diverse contexts.
 - Relationship building and partnering skills.
 - Language competency.⁷⁵
- 6.66 The APSC does collect data on the number of employees who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including those who were born in a country other than Australia or who speak a first language that is not English.⁷⁶ As of June 2025, 26.8 per cent of APS employees report their first language was not exclusively English. Table 6.1 shows the top ten Asian languages in the APS for those whose main first language is not English.

⁷³ APSC, *Submission 194.1*, p. 2.

⁷⁴ APSC, *Submission 194.1*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ APSC, *Submission 194.1*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ APSC, *Submission 194*, p. 3.

Table 6.1 Main first non-English language spoken in the APS

Main first non-English language	Number of employees
Hindi	2,729
Vietnamese	2,086
Chinese (not specified)	1,949
Cantonese	1,830
Mandarin	1,636
Arabic	1,244
Tamil	748
Filipino	652
Sinhalese	595
Tagalog	502

Source: APSC, Submission 194, p. 3

- 6.67 However, while individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may provide valuable cultural and linguistic capability, this data alone does not reveal the extent of Asia capability within the APS.⁷⁷
- 6.68 This lack of data constrains the ability to assess Asia capability across the APS and design and implement effect solutions to develop this capability. The need for comprehensive data collection across the APS as part of the broader need for data and reporting is evident.⁷⁸

Recruitment strategies in the APS

- 6.69 The inquiry revealed that government departments largely do not require or preference Asia capability when making recruitment decision. This is the case even in government departments whose work actively engages with the Asia region, including DFAT and Home Affairs.
- 6.70 Home Affairs 'does not have any recruitment targets for Asian language skills'.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ For discussions of the role of diaspora and culturally and linguistically diverse Australians in building Asia capability, see AAH, *Submission 64*, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Ms Thompson, Asialink, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 14 April 2026, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Home Affairs, *Submission 109.2*, p. 1.

- 6.71 DFAT's graduate program does not require Asian language proficiency, nor do the selection criteria for the graduate program provide advantages for applicants with Asian language capability.⁸⁰ The program also does not have a target or quota for Asian language speakers across each graduate intake.⁸¹
- 6.72 42 members of DFAT's 2025 Graduate Cohort are proficient in an Asian language. Table 6.2 shows the top languages in this cohort

Table 6.2 Most common language proficiencies in the 2025 DFAT Graduate Cohort

Language	2025 Program
French	24
Chinese – Mandarin	10
Spanish	10
Indonesian	8
German	8
Japanese	6
Italian	6
Korean	5
Hindi	5
Arabic	4

Source: DFAT, Supplementary submission 145.1, p. 2.

- 6.73 In addition, as of December 2025, there were 370 DFAT staff with a tested proficiency in an Asian language.⁸²
- 6.74 Concerningly, some of the public service departments had not considered the value of the demand signal that requiring or preferencing an Asian language in graduate programs or broader recruitment practices could have on students considering studying Asian languages in high school or at university.⁸³
- 6.75 As previously discussed, the lack of perceived demand from employers has impacts on the pipeline of students coming through school and universities. Without clear demand from APS employers through targeted recruitment strategies or incentives, the value of Asia capability within the government is not being signalled to prospective and current employees.

⁸⁰ DFAT, *Submission 145.1*, p. 2.

⁸¹ DFAT, *Submission 145.1*, p. 2.

⁸² DFAT, *Submission 145.1*, p. 2.

⁸³ DFAT, *Submission 145.1*, p. 2; APSC, *Submission 194*, p. 3.

Mixed signals

- 6.76 Chinese language and cultural fluency were identified as of strategic importance to Australia and requiring its own unique blend of generalist and specialist skills. Despite this, Australia's national China capability currently 'falls well short of the level required'.⁸⁴
- 6.77 The National Foundation for Australia China Relations Advisory Board discussed that the core capabilities in this area includes mastery of Chinese language, along with advanced training in culture, politics, and history, significant experience living and working in China, and the ability to integrate expert knowledge of China into a broader context of Australia's interests.
- 6.78 China literacy is considered as a broad base of understanding of China's politics, economy and culture. This is needed for Australian institutions, universities, industry associations, businesses and sub-national governments to make risk-informed decisions about engagement with China.⁸⁵
- 6.79 Developing genuine China capability requires extended time in-country. As the Committee heard, basic reading proficiency in Mandarin requires knowledge of at least 3,000 characters, and two to five years of full-time study are typically needed to reach advanced proficiency — much of it best acquired in China itself.
- 6.80 Yet the very in-country experience that builds this capability can later count against young Australians when they seek the government roles where it is most needed.
- 6.81 Concerns were raised that extended undocumented time in China might inhibit or delay receiving a government security clearance and what constitutes a checkable background in vetting processes.
- 6.82 One submitter discussed how they undertook Chinese area and language studies, spent significant time working in China, and expected, due to the significance of the Australia-China relationship that this would lead to long-term career success. However, despite this expertise, they were unable to pass the required security clearance process as they were deemed to have an uncheckable background.⁸⁶
- 6.83 Speaking on these issues, the National Foundation for Australia China Relations (NFACR) told the Committee:
- ...on the security clearance front—I will just talk generally. These issues apply not only to China but more generally. Number one, we really do want people to spend time in country. It's important for the kinds of reasons we've talked about: deep understanding, language, understanding the drivers, and proper judgement about what that country wants, its intentions and its opportunities.

⁸⁴ National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board, *Submission 112*, p. 3.

⁸⁵ National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board, *Submission 112*, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Name withheld, *Submission 188*.

The government, and in particular DFAT, does really value in-country experience. That's very useful and valuable to us.

To work in DFAT, and other agencies like ours, there is a security clearance process. That's important. It goes to an individual's suitability to protect classified information, resources, and activities that they'll need to do in the course of their jobs. In the course of the security clearance process, trustworthiness, integrity, and all those kinds of things are very thoroughly tested. There is in all of that a factor of what's called a checkable background. That goes to things like the length of time someone has spent overseas and the location where they've been. Are there any uncorroborated gaps in that timeline that just can't be checked? Are there risks that just can't be mitigated? Those things are looked at very carefully. They're all accorded equal weight in that process. It's one of those things that, as you say, at times cuts across other interests but has to be protected.⁸⁷

- 6.84 The NFACR noted that in the programs it offers, participants are provided with a briefing about the requirements of Australian Government security clearances.⁸⁸

Current training of staff

- 6.85 The APS has several opportunities for staff to develop language and cultural knowledge of Asia.⁸⁹
- 6.86 For example, the APS Academy provides training in areas of Asia capability to employees across the public service. The APS Academy provides both direct delivery and facilitated access to external training for staff. It is a networked model that allows for content delivery on a single platform and allows public servants to access training material at any time and with no end date.⁹⁰
- 6.87 The APSC also emphasised that the messaging from secretaries about what is valued in the APS, such as the capabilities outlined in the Thodey Review, matters, and that agencies will conduct workforce plans and feed learning and development goals through to teams and individuals.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Mr Gary Cowan, Chief Executive Officer, National Foundation for Australia-China Relations, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 8

⁸⁸ Mr Cowan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 8

⁸⁹ Ms Kirsty McNeil, Executive Director, Diplomatic Academy, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 4;

⁹⁰ Dr Bacon, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 March 2026, pp. 2, 4; Ms Kate Boxsell, Assistant Commissioner, Leadership and Talent, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 March 2025, p. 3.

⁹¹ Dr Bacon, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 March 2026, p. 7.

- 6.88 DFAT also provides training to APS employees, largely through its Diplomatic Academy. Within the Diplomatic Academy there is a clear focus on language and Asia capability.

The Diplomatic Academy teaches 14 Asian languages, primarily to staff moving into the 205 language designated positions – ‘positions which require the language to do the job’ – currently identified within DFAT’s posting structure.⁹²

- 6.89 While these language courses cater to all experience levels, DFAT also noted that when staff move into language designated positions and already possess the required degree of proficiency in the relevant language, there are opportunities to redivert resources for language training towards training for ‘language desirable’ positions or broadly language capabilities within the department.⁹³
- 6.90 In addition to language training, the Diplomatic Academy also offers seminars and courses designed to help staff build broader Asia capability.⁹⁴

A model for sovereign Asia capability: the Australian Defence Force

- 6.91 Defence has substantially invested in uplifting Asia capability across the defence force through its educational institutions.⁹⁵
- 6.92 Defence staff training covers a range of Asian language and cultural knowledge studies at a variety of levels, including through facilitated university study, immersive language courses, training with classmates and facilitators from across the Asian region, micro-credential offerings, and in-country training opportunities. Opportunities to develop Asia capability are incorporated into a variety of training activities, including across short, medium, and long term courses and through remote, in-person, and in-country delivery formats.⁹⁶
- 6.93 Given the nature of Defence, most training to develop Asia capability within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is undertaken with a focus on military operational and strategic goals. Language training, for example, prioritises operational language skills. Defence explained how this works:

We train for a range of reasons, but for operations reasons it might be that we teach someone to say, ‘There’s an enemy unit on that hill with machine guns, they’re occupying that barracks, and it’s heavily guarded, heavily fortified.’ Largely, what we’re trying to do is intensive training very much focused on the military skills that we try to pass.⁹⁷

⁹² Ms McNeil, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 4.

⁹³ Ms McNeil, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2025, p. 6.

⁹⁴ DFAT, *Submission 145*, p. 7.

⁹⁵ Department of Defence, *Submission 190*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Defence, *Submission 190*, pp. 3-6.

⁹⁷ Major General White, Defence, *Committee Hansard*, 4 March 2026, pp. 1-2.

- 6.94 Defence provided substantial data on the number of ADF personnel with Asian language capability, along with details of language and cultural studies enrolments through the Defence's various education initiatives.⁹⁸ There are currently 1,038 ADF members with some level of language ability across 15 Asian languages.⁹⁹
- 6.95 Over a five-year average, 81.5 people per year acquired Asian language skills through the Defence's language programs. These covered 11 Asian languages recognised as being of strategic priority to Australia: Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, Japanese, Khmer (Cambodian), Korean, Malay, Thai, Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea), Vietnamese, Tetum (Timor-Leste), and Urdu (Pakistan).¹⁰⁰
- 6.96 In 2025, 226 military members on the Australian Defence Force Academy's military and education program were enrolled in a degree with an Asian capability focus. This degree is delivered by the University of New South Wales, Canberra, as part of a longstanding collaborative relationship between the Australian Defence Force Academy and the university.¹⁰¹
- 6.97 Box 6.2 presents a case study on the Defence Force School of Languages and its uplift in Asia capability.

Box 6.2 Case-study: The Defence Force School of Languages

The Defence Force School of Languages is based in Laverton, Victoria. It offers courses in a number of Asian languages, as well as cultural training opportunities. This training occurs in several components: short courses, long courses (up to 12 months of immersed learning), modularised (long courses split into modules to be completed across time), and refresher (skills uplift) courses. The variable offerings are designed to provide choice to personnel, 'thereby making the offerings both achievable and accessible regardless of the environment they are working in'.

The languages offered are determined by the requirements of the National Defence Strategy and are prioritised through four lenses: support to Defence's intelligences, acquisition, diplomacy, and operational requirements.

The Defence School of Languages also conducts placement and qualifying tests that are able to determine the level of starting competency, and understand where a person may be most effective in taking up a foreign language.

As part of its language offerings, the Defence Force School of Languages provides dedicated Asian cultural awareness training through long course and modular offerings. This training is completed by over 300 graduates annually. Cultural awareness training culminates in a practical assessment undertaken in-country to assess linguistic and cultural knowledge within the relevant regional environment.

⁹⁸ Defence, *Submission 190*, pp. 4, 6.

⁹⁹ Defence, *Submission 190*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Defence, *Submission 190*, p. 4. The data provided by Defence also includes acquisition statistics for Portuguese, which is spoken in East Timor and Macau.

¹⁰¹ Defence, *Submission 190*, p. 6.

While language skills require ongoing maintenance and refreshing, 'the experiential component of cultural training and immersion ensure that the empathy and understanding of Asian nations do not diminish overtime, thereby assuring Asia capability in people'.

The Defence Force School of Languages collaborates with likeminded institutions, including the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Bureau for International Language Co-ordination, the United Kingdom Defence Centre for Languages and Culture, and the United States Defense Language Institution and Foreign Language Centre. Knowledge is shared with these institutions and with other language institutions throughout the Asia region, which builds military networking and an understanding of shared challenges and capabilities.¹⁰²

- 6.98 The Asia capability training delivered by Defence is designed for the operational needs of the ADF. However, its underlying policy and strategic frameworks and broad educational structures provide an example of the ways Asia capability can be encouraged, developed, and maintained within a highly specialised workforce.

Committee comment

- 6.99 The evidence the Committee received painted a mixed picture on the current state of Asia capability within the Australian workforce. However, it is clear that the existing Asia capable workforce is not sufficient to meet the demands of a dynamic Asian region.
- 6.100 The limited information about the skills present in the Australian workforce poses challenges to identifying areas and skills that require further development. A comprehensive Asia capability workforce needs assessment would provide essential data to inform both education strategies and industry priorities.
- 6.101 This is not solely a problem for private industry but also for the public sector. Asia capable graduates are not seeing a clear entry point for careers in Asia and there are limited demand signals highlighting the careers available to young people.
- 6.102 Few Australian employers signal that they value Asia capability in recruitment or reward it in career progression. Being Asia capable is still seen as a 'nice to have', rather than an essential professional skill. This weak demand contributes to low student uptake of Asian languages and cultural studies; without visible career pathways, students invest their time elsewhere.
- 6.103 Breaking this cycle requires the federal government to lead by example. Rather than flagging Asia capability as a priority without strategy or policy to build it, the government should create demand signals through its own workforce practices while also working with industry to demonstrate the value of Asia capability in private sector careers.

¹⁰² Defence, *Submission 190*, pp. 6-7.

- 6.104 It is deeply concerning that despite the widespread acknowledgement of Asia capability as a priority across the Australian Public Service, little has been done to meaningfully track, recruit for, or substantially develop this capability.
- 6.105 While some individual departments hold data relating to language proficiency across their staff, there is a substantial lack of data tracking Asia capability skills across the broader APS. The provision of data on culturally and linguistically diverse employees is not a sufficient substitute for robust data on Asia capable staff; diversity metrics are not equivalent to capability metrics.
- 6.106 The lack of a targeted recruitment approach or employment incentives for Asia capable graduates further signals that the Australian government does not value Asia capability in its workforce. This signals to both potential and current APS employees and managers that Asian language and cultural knowledge is not a priority area for capability building, despite statements to the contrary.
- 6.107 The department with carriage of Australia's diplomacy in Asia recruited more graduates proficient in French in 2025 than in Mandarin and Indonesian combined, and exactly as many as in Mandarin, Indonesian and Japanese combined. The Committee intends no criticism of the graduates concerned. The numbers describe the pool the education system offered DFAT to recruit from, and they are the demand signal and the supply failure of this report in a single table.
- 6.108 Current training models for upskilling existing staff within targeted APS departments are relatively successful. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Diplomatic Academy and the Department of Defence's various educational opportunities demonstrate the way specialist Asia expertise can be built within departments operating at the frontline with the Asia region.
- 6.109 However, these models are insufficient to upskill the entire APS workforce. Recruiting specifically for Asia capability not only builds on existing base of language and cultural knowledge within government departments but also frees up additional resources to deepen existing capabilities and emphasise specialised operational skills.
- 6.110 Additionally, course offerings through APS Academy or the Diplomatic Academy rely on a high level of individual employee initiative and manager support. The development of Asia capability among APS employees is not integrated into departmental or whole-of-APS policies.

Recommendation 31

6.111 The Committee recommends that Jobs and Skills Australia undertake a comprehensive Asia capability workforce needs assessment to:

- **Quantify current and projected demand for Asia capability across sectors.**
- **Identify specific skill requirements including language proficiency levels, cultural competencies and regional knowledge.**
- **Assess gaps between current workforce capability and projected requirements.**
- **Inform education and training investment decisions through annual reporting on workforce trends.**

Recommendation 32

6.112 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government act as a model employer for Asia capability and consider:

- **Designating Asia capability as a selection criterion in central government agencies.**
- **Developing recruitment targets for Asia capability in Australian Public Service graduate programs and designating positions in graduate programs for Asian language skills.**
- **Providing structured internship opportunities for university students with Asia capability in relevant departments.**
- **Establishing an APS Capability Framework which supports career development opportunities for employees to develop and maintain Asia capability.**

6.113 The Committee acknowledges that in certain circumstances, time spent in China may pose barriers for government security clearance processes. It does not question the importance of rigorous security vetting. However, practical advice can be provided to students, particularly around record keeping, in order to inform their decisions should they want to work in government in future.

6.114 There is no reason this kind of practical, risk-informed guidance should be available only to participants in a handful of sponsored programs. This information should be made available to every Australian undertaking study, research or an extended placement in the region, it would give students the certainty they need to plan both their study and their careers, and would help ensure that time spent building a national capability is treated as an asset, rather than an obstacle, when those Australians later seek to serve their country.

Recommendation 33

- 6.115 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with schools, universities, and community language educators to provide support and practical guidance for Australians undertaking study, research or extended placements in Asia on how periods of overseas residence and contacts may bear on a security clearance assessment, and on the documentation and preparation that can support a timely assessment on their return.**
- 6.116 The Committee considers that the business Asia capability deficit documented in the evidence is principally a demand-side problem, and that executive and workforce education is one of the few proven levers available to the Commonwealth to address it. The evidence of the ASX 200 assessments is that boardroom and executive capability has not improved across a decade in which Australia's commercial exposure to the region has only deepened.
- 6.117 The Committee notes that the contrast between Asialink's two operating arms amounts to a natural experiment in Commonwealth funding design. The arm with secure, multi-year core funding has scaled to reach well over 100,000 Australians; the arm whose core funding ceased in 2015 has seen its national reach significantly reduced under a fee-for-service model. The lesson for program design is direct: business Asia capability education delivers at national scale only when its core funding is secure and long-term.
- 6.118 The Committee further considers that business education in Asia capability complements, and depends upon, the schools and university pipeline addressed elsewhere in this report. Executive programs convert the foundational capability built in the education system into commercial and national value; they cannot substitute for it.

Recommendation 34

- 6.119 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government invest in Asia capability education for Australian businesses.**



Coalition Members' Comment

- 1.1 While the Coalition members acknowledge the compelling evidence regarding the importance of strengthening Australia's Asia capability, we also note that Australia's national interests are not confined to a single region.
- 1.2 Australia's trade, security, diplomatic and cultural relationships are increasingly diverse and global in nature, encompassing not only Asia but also Europe, North America, the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.
- 1.3 The Coalition members support efforts to improve Australians' understanding of Asia, increase participation in Asian studies and languages, and build the workforce capabilities necessary to engage effectively with the region. However, we emphasise that any renewed focus on Asia capability should not come at the expense of broader international engagement or the study of other languages and cultures.
- 1.4 European languages continue to have significant global reach and strategic value. Languages such as French and Spanish are spoken across multiple continents, are official languages of major international institutions, and remain important for diplomacy, trade, development, security cooperation and cultural exchange. Similarly, other language capabilities contribute to Australia's ability to engage effectively in an increasingly interconnected world.
- 1.5 The Coalition members therefore consider that the objective should be to strengthen Australia's Asia capability within a broader national framework of international capability.
- 1.6 Educational settings should equip students with the linguistic, cultural and analytical skills needed to engage confidently across multiple regions, recognising that Australia's future prosperity and security depend upon diverse global relationships as well as strong engagement with Asia.
- 1.7 Accordingly, measures to promote Asian studies and Asian languages should complement, rather than displace, support for other strategically important language and area studies disciplines. This balanced approach will better prepare Australians to operate in a complex international environment and advance Australia's interests wherever opportunities and challenges arise.
- 1.8 Coalition members also note the broader educational benefits of language study.

- 1.9 Learning languages that have shaped the development of English, including many European languages, enhances understanding of English itself by providing students with greater insight into the origins of vocabulary, linguistic structures, historical influences and cultural traditions. This can strengthen literacy outcomes while simultaneously fostering international engagement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Birrell', with a long horizontal stroke above the letters.

Mr Sam Birrell MP
Deputy Chair
Nationals Member for Nicholls

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Z. McKenzie', with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ms Zoe McKenzie MP
Liberal Member for Flinders

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Rebello', with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mr Leon Rebello MP
LNP Member for McPherson



Additional comments from Ms Kate Chaney MP

- 1.1 The Committee's report identifies the Job-Ready Graduates Package (JRGP) as a contributing factor in the decline of Asia capability in Australian universities. I believe the Committee should go further in drawing out the implications of the JRGP's structural failings and in recommending action.
- 1.2 As the report documents, the JRGP attempted to use student fees to shift demand for different fields of study. While it lowered the student contribution for foreign language courses, it simultaneously raised costs for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) degrees, increasing the maximum student contribution for the latter from \$6,804 to \$14,500.
- 1.3 The result is a purported financial incentive for students to study language without culture, precisely the opposite of genuine Asia capability. Deterring students from HASS study reduces the pipeline into Asian language and area studies programs. It weakens the institutional sustainability of programs in history, politics, international relations, linguistics and cultural studies, which produce precisely the kind of deep regional expertise this report identifies as critical to Australia's national interest. HASS degrees motivate students to pursue languages in the first place and provide the contextual knowledge that gives language capability its real value.
- 1.4 Addressing Australia's Asia capability deficit cannot be separated from higher education funding settings. Targeted investments in language programs, teaching pipelines and in-country experiences will have limited effect if the underlying funding structure continues to signal that understanding Asia's societies, cultures and politics is not worth students' time or money.
- 1.5 This attempt at shifting demand for different fields of study appears to have been unsuccessful, both in increasing language enrolments and decreasing HASS enrolments. This is consistent with the weight of independent evidence about the JRGP's broader performance, referred to in submissions. The Universities Accord Review, the Productivity Commission, and independent researchers have all found that student course choices are driven primarily by interest and aptitude rather than fee differentials. It appears that price signals have not redirected enrolment but they have increased debt burdens and deepened inequities, particularly for students in lower-earning fields.
- 1.6 Whether or not these price signals are effective at shifting demand, the internal contradiction of lowering language course costs while increasing HASS degree costs has not been effective in supporting greater Asia capability and the impact of the JRGP on Asian capability deserves further investigation.

Recommendation 1

- 1.7 I recommend that the Australian Government, as part of its ongoing reform of higher education funding, prioritise review and remediation of the student contribution increases imposed on humanities, arts, and social sciences degrees under the Job-Ready Graduates Package**

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "K Chaney", enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

Ms Kate Chaney MP
Independent Member for Curtin



A. Submissions

- 1 Indonesia Council, Monash Herb Feith Indonesia Engagement Centre, and ACICIS
- 2 Western Australian AI Hub
- 3 Mr Riley Everett
- 4 Dr Allan Patience
 - 4.1 Supplementary to submission 4
- 5 Mr Philipp Ivanov
- 6 Mr Ravi Krishnamurthy
- 7 Dr Mark Harrison
- 8 Mr Michael Kramer
- 9 Mr Chad Birks
- 10 Australian Council of State School Organisations
 - 10.1 Supplementary to submission 10
- 11 Dr Zane Goebel
- 12 Australian Primary Principals Association
 - 12.1 Supplementary to submission 12
- 13 Dr Jennifer Star OAM
- 14 Ms Hingor Chung
- 15 Society and Culture Association
- 16 Council of Chinese Language Schools Victoria (CCLSV)
- 17 *Name Withheld*
- 18 Asialink Education
- 19 The Social Policy Group
- 20 Australia India Institute

- 21** Professor Campbell Macknight
- 22** Curtin University
- 23** Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth and Westralian Indonesian Language Teachers Association
- 23.1 Supplementary to submission 23
- 24** Professor Hal Hill
- 25** Ms Tessa Suppiah
- 26** Dr Kayoko Hashimoto
- 27** Multicultural Education and Languages Committee (MELC)
- 28** Dr Shannon Brincat, Associate Professor Gail Crimmins and Tami Harriot (CIDSEL)
- 29** The School of Social Sciences, The University of Western Australia
- 30** Asian Academic Research Team
- 31** Languages Teachers Western Australia
- 32** Australian National University College of Asia and the Pacific
- 32.1 Supplementary to submission 32
- 33** Mr Thomas Mansfield
- 34** Victorian Indonesian Language Teachers' Association
- 35** Centre for Population Ageing Research (CEPAR)
- 36** The Group of Eight (Go8)
- 36.1 Supplementary to submission 36
- 37** Associate Professor Annie Pohlman
- 38** Charles Darwin University
- 39** Dr Angela Cook
- 40** Mr Max Stretton
- 41** Associate Professor Ruth Fielding
- 41.1 Supplementary to submission 41
- 42** University of Tasmania

- 43** Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities
- 44** The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia
- 45** Independent Higher Education Australia
- 46** Japanese Studies Association of Australia (JSAA)
- 47** The Association For Learning Mandarin In Australia Incorporated
 - 47.1 Supplementary to submission 47
- 48** MusicNT
- 49** Asia Institute, The University of Melbourne
- 50** Dr Kirsty Gusmao
- 51** Association of Mainland Southeast Asia Scholars
- 52** Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
 - 52.1 Supplementary to submission 52
- 53** Professor David Hill
- 54** Dr Julien Leyre
- 55** School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Monash University
- 56** Griffith Asia Institute
- 57** Beasley Intercultural
- 58** Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA)
 - 58.1 Supplementary to submission 58
- 59** Associate Professor Salvatore Babones
- 60** Professor Melissa Crouch
- 61** Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia
- 62** Miss Victoria Tracey
- 63** Languages Teacher Association of Tasmania (LTAT)

- 64** Australian Academy of the Humanities
- 64.1 Supplementary to submission 64
 - 64.2 Supplementary to submission 64
 - 64.3 Supplementary to submission 64
 - 64.4 Supplementary to submission 64
- 65** Asian Australian Professionals Collective (AAPC)
- 66** Dr Louisa Field
- 66.1 Supplementary to submission 66
- 67** Asian Studies Association of Australia
- 68** Mr Garry Strachan
- 69** Ms India Lewis
- 70** Japanese Language Teachers Association of South Australia Incorporated
- 71** Universities Australia
- 72** Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
- 72.1 Supplementary to submission 72
 - 72.2 Supplementary to submission 72
 - 72.3 Supplementary to submission 72
- 73** Pondok Bahasa
- 73.1 Supplementary to submission 73
- 74** Australia China Business Council
- 74.1 Supplementary to submission 74
- 75** Australian Consortium of In-Country Indonesian Studies (Acicis)
- 76** Canberra Indonesian Teachers
- 77** Dr Levi Durbidge
- 78** Professor Michele Ford
- 78.1 Supplementary to submission 78
- 79** Asia Society Australia
- 80** Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU)

- 81** Australia-India Innovation Corridor Pty Ltd
- 81.1 Supplementary to submission 81
- 82** Intensive Chinese Network
- 83** Dr Wei Li
- 84** The University of Western Australia
- 85** Chinese Language Teachers' Association of Victoria (CLTAV)
- 86** Dr Jun Fu, Dr Jing Qi and Dr Wildred Wang
- 87** Mr Yahya Zakaria
- 87.1 Supplementary to submission 87
- 88** Australia-Indonesia Youth Association
- 89** Australian Industry Group
- 90** The University of Melbourne
- 91** Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue
- 92** Dr Rowena Ward
- 93** Australian Association for Research in Education
- 94** Asialink Leaders Program
- 95** Dr Emily Hills and Mrs Janelle Horsington
- 96** Advisory Board - Centre for Australia-India Relations
- 97** South Asian Studies Association of Australia
- 98** Per Capita
- 99** Associate Professor Yu Tao
- 100** Dr Jennifer Hsu
- 101** Dr Gerhard Hoffstaedter, Professor Antje Missbach and Dr Jemma Purdey
- 102** Languages Roadshow
- 103** The Australia-Indonesia Centre

- 104** Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA)
- 104.1 Supplementary to submission 104
- 105** Mr Elliott Clutterbuck
- 106** Dr Farida Akhtar
- 107** Australian Technology Network of Universities
- 108** Murdoch University
- 109** Department of Home Affairs
- 109.1 Supplementary to submission 109
 - 109.2 Supplementary to submission 109
 - 109.3 Supplementary to submission 109
- 110** Osmond Chiu
- 111** International Education Association of Australia (IEAA)
- 112** National Foundation for Australia-China Relations Advisory Board
- 113** Dr Jess Gifkins, Professor Carolyn Cartier and Associate Professor Emi Otsuji
- 114** Dr Gary Sigley
- 115** Ms Rebecca McLaren and Ms Benita Chudleigh
- 116** Dr Michelle Kohler
- 116.1 Supplementary to submission 116
- 117** Australian Centre on China in the World
- 118** Dr Zara Maxwell-Smith
- 118.1 Supplementary to submission 118
- 119** CPA Australia
- 120** Hayley Winchcombe, Lauren Alexander, Mikaylie Page, Yige Xu, and Racheline Tantular
- 121** Westpac Scholars Trust
- 122** Innovative Research Universities (IRU)
- 123** Australia Indonesia Institute
- 124** Ms Lydia Santoso

- 125** Language Teachers Association of the Northern Territory - Japanese Language Representative
- 126** Rejoice Chinese Christian Communication Centre Inc
- 127** La Trobe Asia
- 128** Asian Australian Alliance
- 129** Asialink
- 129.1 Supplementary to submission 129
- 130** Languages Teachers Association of the Northern Territory
- 131** Dr Kate Delmo
- 132** Rusty Compass
- 133** The Hacker Exchange Pty Ltd ("HEX")
- 134** Foundation for Australian Studies in China
- 135** Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, Lydia Santoso, Dr Natali Pearson and Dr Elly Kent
- 136** Asian Australian Lawyers Association
- 137** Chinese Australian Network
- 138** The University of Queensland
- 138.1 Supplementary to submission 138
- 139** Modern Language Teachers Association of South Australia
- 140** Monash Japanese Language Education Centre
- 141** Perth USAsia Centre
- 142** Australia Japan Society of NSW, Inc.
- 143** Ms Jaime Nakahara
- 144** Kristien Sarwo Rini
- 145** Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- 145.1 Supplementary to submission 145
- 146** Dr Emerald King
- 147** CAUSINDY (Conference of Australian and Indonesian Youth)

- 148** Ms Lisa Gay
- 149** Gamelan DanAnda
- 150** The RMIT Community Languages Teacher Education Program
- 150.1 Supplementary to submission 150
- 151** Ms Mami Yoshino
- 152** Mr Alexander Walsh
- 153** Australia Indonesia Business Council
- 154** Korean Studies Association of Australiasia
- 155** Australian Broadcasting Corporation
- 156** Languages Teachers Victoria
- 157** Ms Clarice Campbell
- 158** Dr Andrew Zint
- 159** Mr Ryley Walley
- 160** Dr Florence Boulard
- 161** Advisory Board of the ASEAN-Australia Centre
- 161.1 Supplementary to submission 161
 - 161.2 Supplementary to submission 161
- 162** Dr Rebecca Cairns and Associate Professor Michiko Weinmann
- 163** Dr Jia Ying Neoh
- 164** Duncan Graham
- 165** Business Council of Australia
- 165.1 Supplementary to submission 165
- 166** Dr Gary Bonar
- 166.1 Supplementary to submission 166
- 167** RMIT University
- 168** Queensland University of Technology
- 169** Business Council for Sustainable Development Australia

- 170** The Korean Education Centre in Sydney
- 171** The University of Sydney
- 171.1 Supplementary to submission 171
- 172** Creative Australia
- 173** Monash University
- 174** Lowy Institute
- 175** Independent Schools Australia
- 176** University of New South Wales
- 177** VietSpeak
- 178** Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS)
- 179** Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade)
- 180** Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education
- 180.1 Supplementary to submission 180
- 181** Northern Territory Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations
- 182** ANU South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub (SARAH)
- 183** Australia-Korea Business Council Limited
- 184** *Name Withheld*
- 185** *Name Withheld*
- 186** *Name Withheld*
- 187** *Name Withheld*
- 188** *Name Withheld*
- 189** South Indian Community Inc
- 190** Department of Defence
- 190.1 Supplementary to submission 190
- 191** Department of Education
- 191.1 Supplementary to submission 191
 - 191.2 Supplementary to submission 191

- 192** Vyatra
- 193** Lesley Harbon
- 194** Australian Public Service Commission
 - 194.1 Supplementary to submission 194
- 195** Community Languages Australia



B. Exhibits

- 1 Mr Philipp Ivanov, 'The Renewed Case for Asia Literacy', October 2025
- 2 Sharon Deaon and Peter Gray, Asian Australian Lawyers Association 'Asian Australian Representation in the Legal Profession: A Cultural Diversity Snapshot' with accompanying infographic, November 2025
- 3 Asian Australian Lawyers Association, 'Superdiversity Action Plan 2025', December 2025
- 4 Mr Joel Backwell, 'Strengthening Australia's Indonesia literacy – a roadmap', April 2026



C. Public hearings

Wednesday, 29 October 2025

Canberra

Department of Education

- Dr Jessica Hartmann, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Assurance Branch
- Simon Moore, Assistant Secretary, National Security and Resilience Branch
- Ms Amy Forbes, Acting Assistant Secretary, Curriculum and Learning Branch
- Ms Shane Samuelson, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Policy, Teaching and Learning Division

Wednesday, 5 November 2025

Canberra

Asian Australian Voices

- Ms Jasmine Batra, Managing Director, Arrow Digital
- Dr Jennifer Hsu, Private capacity
- Dr Wei Li, Private capacity
- Ms Danielle Rajendram, Director, Advisory and Insights, Asialink Business
- Ms Lydia Santoso, Chair, Australia Indonesia Institute; and National Vice-President, Australia Indonesia Council
- Dr Jun Tong, Mandala Partners

Wednesday, 3 December 2025

Canberra and via videoconference

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

- Dr Lauren Bain, First Assistant Secretary, Southeast Asia Maritime Division, Office of Southeast Asia
- Mr Gary Cowan, Chief Executive Officer, National Foundation for Australia-China Relations
- Ms Fiona Hoggart, Head, ASEAN-Australia Centre
- Mr Joshua House, Director, New Colombo Plan Secretariat

- Mr Cal McGuirk, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Australia-India Relations, South and Central Asia Division
- Ms Kirsty McNeil, Executive Director, Diplomatic Academy

Universities roundtable – Part one

- Ms Kirsten Andrews, Vice-President, External Engagement, University of Sydney
- Professor Greg Fox, Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre, University of Sydney
- Mr Greg Hainge, Head of School, School of Languages and Cultures, University of Queensland
- Professor Heather Sharon Zwicker, Executive Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, University of Queensland
- Professor Michael Wesley, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global, Culture and Engagement, University of Melbourne
- Ms Martine Letts, Chief Executive Officer, Asialink Group, University of Melbourne

Universities roundtable – Part two - College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University

- Dr Mathew Davies, Associate Dean, Education
- Dr Elly Kent, Deputy Director, Languages, School of Culture, History and Language

Monday, 8 December 2025

Canberra and via videoconference

Session 1 – School Associations panel

- Mrs Cheryl Brennan, Vice President, Australian Professional Teachers Association
- Ms Angela Falkenberg, President, Australian Primary Principals Association
- Mrs Jennifer Rickard, Board Member, Australian Council of State School Organisations

Session 2 – Language educators panel

- Dr Louisa Field, Private capacity
- Dr Zara Maxwell-Smith, Private capacity
- Mr Yahya Zakaria, Private capacity

Session 3 – Academics – Cultural and language studies panel

- Professor Melissa Crouch, Private capacity
- Professor Michele Ford, Private capacity
- Dr Zane Goebel, Private capacity

Session 4 – Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations

- Professor Anne-Marie Morgan, Vice-President
- Mrs Kylie Farmer, Treasurer

Session 5 – Language and cultural associations panel

- Mr Andrew Catton, Founder, Pondok Bahasa
- Mr Erin McMahon, Educational Content Specialist, Pondok Bahasa
- Mr Brendon Cook, President, Westralian Indonesia Language Teachers Association
- Ms Susan (Sue) Cooper, Chairperson, Balai Bahasa Indonesia Perth
- Mr Liam Prince, Director, Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies

Session 6 – Association for Learning Mandarin in Australia Inc.

- Dr Mandy Scott, Public Officer
- Ms Yue (Rachel) Qiu, Treasurer

Wednesday, 11 February 2026

Canberra

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

- Mr Stephen Gniel, Chief Executive Officer
- Mrs Kathryn Tully, Executive Director, Curriculum

Wednesday, 4 March 2026

Canberra

Department of Home Affairs

- Ms Sneha Chatterjee, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Multicultural Affairs Division
- Mr Malcolm McAllister, Assistant Secretary, Special Envoy Support and Management Branch, Office for Multicultural Affairs Division
- Mr Michael Willard, Deputy Secretary, Immigration Programs Group

Department of Defence

- Major General Martin White, Commander, Australian Defence College
- Ms Karen Radford, Assistant Secretary, North and South Asia Branch, International Policy Division

Wednesday, 11 March 2026

Canberra

Australian Public Service Commission

- Dr Rachel Bacon, Deputy Commissioner
- Ms Kate Boxsell, Assistant Commissioner, Leadership and Talent
- Ms Kristen Risby, Director, Capability Strategy and Insights

Wednesday, 18 March 2026

Canberra and via videoconference

Session 1– Academies of humanities and social sciences panel

- Professor Kate Darian-Smith, President, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
- Professor Kate McGregor, Fellow, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
- Ms Inga Davis, Executive Director, Australian Academy of the Humanities
- Professor Louise Edwards, Fellow, Australian Academy of the Humanities
- Professor Joseph Lo Bianco, Fellow, Australian Academy of the Humanities

Session 2 – Language teacher education

- Associate Professor Ruth Fielding, Private capacity
- Professor Lesley Harbon, Private capacity
- Dr Michelle Kohler, Private capacity

Session 3

- Mr Richard McGregor, Private capacity

Monday, 13 April 2026

Canberra and via videoconference

Session 1 – South Asian Studies organisations

- Dr Adam Bowles, President, South Asian Studies Association of Australia
- Dr Priya Chacko, Executive Committee Member, South Asian Studies Association of Australia
- Mr Shaneeq Syed, Undergraduate Researcher, South Asian Research and Advocacy Hub, Australian National University

Session 2 - South Indian Community

- Mr Tarun Balaji Navaneetha Krishnan, President
- Mrs Latha Navaneetha Krishnan, Founder and Secretary

Session 3 – Hindi language educators

- Dr Christopher Diamond, Private capacity
- Dr Ian Woolford, Private capacity

Session 4 – Chinese language associations

- Ms Delan Lin, Member, Council of Chinese Language Schools Victoria
- Mr Stanley Wang, Convenor, Intensive Chinese Network

Session 5 – Community language educators

- Mr Fahry Abubaker, Executive Officer, AFESA Community Languages Australia
- Dr Fuxin Li, Secretary, AFESA Community Languages Australia
- Dr Ken Cruickshank, Professor, Education and Languages, and Director, Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education, University of Sydney
- Professor Kerry Mullan, Convenor, Languages, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- Associate Professor Jing Qi, Program Manager, RMIT Community Languages Teacher Education Program, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Session 6

- Mr Joel Backwell, Private capacity

Session 7

- Professor Hugh White, Private capacity

Tuesday, 14 April 2026

Canberra and via videoconference

Session 1 – Business peak body organisations panel

- Mr Antony Shaw, Chair, Global Engagement Program, Business Council of Australia
- Ms Rachel Thompson, Chief Executive Officer, Asialink

Session 2 – Asian business councils panel

- Mrs Sharbani Dhar, Co-founder and Director, Australia-India Innovation Corridor
- Ms Sangeeta Mulchandani, Co-founder and Director, Australia-India Innovation Corridor
- Mrs Elizabeth (Liz) Griffin, Chief Executive Officer, Australia-Korea Business Council
- Mr Tom Parker, National Chief Executive Officer, Australia China Business Council
- Mr Victor Ruifeng Liang, Program Manager, China Capability, Australia China Business Council

Session 3

- Ms Mikaylie Page, Private capacity
- Ms Racheline Tantular, Private capacity
- Ms Hayley Winchcombe, Private capacity

Thursday, 30 April 2026

Committee Room 2R1, Parliament House, Canberra and via videoconference

Department of Education

- Dr Jessica Hartmann, Assistant Secretary, Higher Education Assurance Branch
- Mr Simon Moore, Assistant Secretary, National Security and Resilience Branch
- Dr Damian Oliver, Acting First Assistant Secretary, International Division
- Dr Mel Southwell-Lee, Assistant Secretary, Curriculum and Learning Branch
- Ms Genevieve Watson, Assistant Secretary, Teacher and Learning Branch

Australian Tertiary Education Commission

- Mr David Turvey, Executive Director