



Australian Government
Department of Education

Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond

Submission from the Department of Education to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education



Contents

Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond	3
Introduction	3
Social Cohesion, Multiculturalism and Global Awareness.....	3
Languages	4
School education.....	5
Early childhood education	9
Higher education.....	10
Australian Tertiary Education Commission.....	10
People-to-people education and research linkages	11
Counsellor network.....	12
Transnational Education	12
ASEAN Research Collaboration Internship Program.....	13
Southeast Asia prioritisation in managed growth settings.....	13
Mobility programs.....	14
Promoting the Benefits of Asia Capabilities and Languages.....	14

Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond

Introduction

The Department of Education welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond.

The department notes the Inquiry's Terms of Reference and would like to provide the Committee with information on the department's programs and policies which support building Asia capability through social cohesion and language learning from the early years through to school, higher education and international sectors.

Social Cohesion, Multiculturalism and Global Awareness

The importance of an understanding of the values and viewpoints shared by our Asian and global neighbours is reflected in Australia's education system.

At the school level, the Australian Curriculum fosters social cohesion from Foundation to Year 10 through the *Intercultural Understanding* general capability, which supports students to learn how to live and work successfully in culturally diverse settings.

This capability encompasses the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions students need to understand and respond appropriately when cultures intersect. It encourages students to recognise and respect cultural diversity, and to reflect on their own cultural identities and those of others.

By learning to value different cultural perspectives and practices, students are supported to become responsible, ethical, and active citizens in local, national, and global contexts.

The *Intercultural Understanding* general capability involves students developing the ability to:

- Reflect on culture and cultural diversity
- Engage with cultural and linguistic diversity
- Navigate intercultural interactions with empathy and respect

This capability is integrated across key learning areas including English, Humanities and Social Sciences, Health and Physical Education, Languages, Technologies, and the Arts.

The *Intercultural Understanding* general capability complements the *Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia* cross-curriculum priority in schools, which deepens students' knowledge of the histories, cultures, and contributions of the peoples of Asia.

Together, they support 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. This alignment strengthens students' capacity to navigate intercultural contexts and contributes to building a more inclusive and resilient society.

The Government also invests in initiatives to promote social cohesion in schools, which aligns with its focus on *wellbeing for learning and engagement*, one of the three priority areas of the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding 2025-2034*.

The Government is providing a total of \$12.1 million over five years (2021–22 to 2025–26) to Together for Humanity to deliver a national program that supports students, teachers and parents to engage with diversity and build inter-cultural and inter-faith understanding, with an additional \$4 million committed in the 2024 Budget to strengthen efforts in addressing discrimination, including antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Together For Humanity delivers programs such as:

- Ambassador Program, where Jewish, Muslim and First Nations students are trained to facilitate inter-cultural and inter-faith encounters with their peers
- Local Youth Summits, held in partnership with local governments, faith and cultural leaders/organisations and schools to develop proposals to improve inclusion and social cohesion
- Intercultural Understanding Partnership, which provides low value grants and support for school-based projects focus on fostering students' acceptance and empathy with others
- Cross-cultural program, which provides opportunities for students with diverse backgrounds to engage with each other
- Professional learning opportunities for teachers to increase understanding and confidence in incorporating inter-cultural understanding and enable them to facilitate more inclusive teaching practices.

The Government has also provided \$3 million over 4 years (2020-21 to 2023-24) the Anti-Defamation Commission to expand Click Against Hate by reimagining it as a digital platform for the national audience. The program helps students in primary and secondary schools, of all backgrounds, including marginalised and disadvantaged, to develop interfaith understanding, an appreciation of diversity, and strategies to respond to intolerance when it happens to them online or when they see it happening to others. As of August 2025, over 1,200 government and non-government schools across Australia have registered to use the Click Against Hate platform.

Australia's education system has attracted quality international students from around the world for decades. In particular, Australia is seen as a study destination of choice for many students in the Asia region. These international students bring global perspectives, knowledge and languages which benefit Australian students throughout all stages of their education. The internationalisation of Australian campuses, cities and communities also enhances multiculturalism and global awareness, including strengthening understanding of Asia, among the broader Australian population.

Languages

People-to-people links and cross-cultural awareness are supported by language learning, which enhances lifelong engagement and capability when engaging with other countries. In our region, these enduring connections support Australia's soft power, diplomacy and economic participation. This is particularly important, noting the Government's commitment to greater engagement in Southeast Asia through *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*. Instilling interest and demand in Asian language learning and capability from an early age will build Asia capability in Australians at all levels of our education system.

Language learning contributes to Asia capability by stimulating cultural interest and awareness. Conversely, interest in an aspect of a country's culture – for example, popular culture, music or storytelling – can motivate students to learn language. Interest in cultural and language studies can also be fostered through demonstrating the benefits for potential employment opportunities, particularly the attractiveness these skills could have to prospective employers in an interconnected world. Interest in Asian culture and Asian language are closely intertwined, and successful public policy would need to take this into account.

School education

In the school education context, languages is one of the eight learning areas under the Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 was approved by Education Ministers on 1 April 2022. It sets the expectations for what all Australian students should be taught, regardless of where they live or their background – from their first year of schooling to Year 10.

The Australian Curriculum: Languages for students from Foundation to Year 10 currently contains the following languages: Arabic, Auslan, Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Modern Greek, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese as well as the Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages, and the Framework for Classical Languages including Classical Greek and Latin.)

The Australian Curriculum has been designed to enable all students to engage in learning a language in addition to English. It recognises the features that languages share, as well as the distinctiveness of specific languages.

While the Australian Government plays a national leadership role in school education, state and territory government and non-government education authorities are responsible for the administration and operation of schools within their jurisdictions. Education authorities, school leaders, teachers and communities determine which of the languages are taught within their schools, depending on their local needs and contexts. Each jurisdiction takes a different approach to the delivery of languages education.

Languages are also taught at beginner through to advanced levels in the Australian higher education sector, including in universities – which are also the key source of trained language teachers for schools.

Data on student participation in languages in the lower years of schooling is not collected at a national level. In the senior secondary years, ACARA collects information on Year 12 enrolments by subject area through the National Report on Schooling in Australia¹.

ACARA's data shows that while there has been a steady decline in the uptake of languages other than English (LOTE) by senior secondary students, the proportion of which languages are most studied remains fairly consistent. The top three languages taught are Japanese, Chinese and French.

Male students are consistently less likely to study languages in Year 12 than female. In 2023 Year 12 enrolments, 6.0% of male students enrolled in LOTE, compared to 9.2% of female students.

The data in Table 1 shows the percentage of students learning a LOTE in Year 12 (including the percentage of students studying an Asian language) is going down, however the distribution of

enrolments across the major language courses has remained steady from 2013 to 2023. In Table 2 the data is broken down by the language. In 2022, of Year 12 student enrolments in languages other than English (LOTE), 47.5% were studying one of the top 4 Asian languages (Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian or Vietnamese). This dropped to 45.9% in 2023

Table 1: Percentage of Year 12 students learning a LOTE from 2010 to 2023

Year	Percentage of Year 12 students learning LOTE	% of Year 12 students learning the top 4 Asian languages	Percentage of Year 12 students learning LOTE who are learning the top 4 Asian languages
2010	11.3	5.4	48.0
2011	10.9	5.2	47.4
2012	10.9	5.0	45.6
2013	10.5	4.8	45.9
2014	10.3	4.7	46.5
2015	10.2	4.8	47.0
2016	10.2	4.7	46.5
2017	10.3	5.0	48.2
2018	10.2	5.1	50.0
2019	10.3	5.0	48.9
2020	9.5	4.6	47.9
2021	8.6	4.1	47.3
2022	8.2	3.9	47.5
2023	7.6	3.5	45.9

Source: [ACARA, National Report on Schooling in Australia, 2023](#) and calculations by Department of Education

Table 2 breaks down Year 12 LOTE enrolments in 2013, 2018 and 2023 by the language studied. The 'Other' category includes both Asian and non-Asian languages. Other breakdowns are available at the ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia Year 12 subject enrolments page at www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/year-12-subject-enrolments.

Table 2: Breakdown of Year 12 LOTE enrolments by language in selected years

Language	2013	2018	2023
Japanese	19.7	21.4	22.6
French	20.9	17.9	19.3
German	7.5	6.8	6.4
Chinese	19.1	21.9	17.4
Italian	9.4	8.6	7.6
Indonesian	4.2	3.7	3.0
Greek	2.2	2.2	2.4
Vietnamese	2.9	3.0	2.9
Spanish	3.0	3.3	4.2
Arabic	1.7	2.4	2.8
Other	9.5	8.8	11.3
Total	100	100	100

Source: [ACARA, National Report on Schooling in Australia, 2023](#)

In 2019, the former Government funded the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) for the development of a draft national languages strategy and plan to inform language teaching in Australia. The National Languages Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia, alongside two supporting research reports, were published on the AFMLTA website in 2024.¹ The research reports provide an overview of language policy and programs in Australian schools across all states and territories, a snapshot of language participation in schools, as well as identifying curriculum and teacher training needs, data trends and recent developments in Australian languages education. The plan and reports can be found at <https://nlps.afmlta.asn.au/>.

¹ AFMLTA, (2024). Towards a National Plan and Strategy for Languages Education in Australia, <https://nlps.afmlta.asn.au/afmlta-report-3-nlps-2024-v3-digital-2/><https://nlps.afmlta.asn.au/afmlta-report-3-nlps-2024-v3-digital-2/>

Language teachers in schools

For many schools, a key constraint is the difficulty of finding teachers who can teach languages. Data from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) Teacher Survey shows that in 2023, 32 per cent of secondary school teachers teaching Languages Other Than English (LOTE) were teaching out-of-field. Secondary teachers are reported as teaching out-of-field if they are teaching at least one subject within a Key Learning Area (e.g. LOTE), where they have not studied this subject at university for at least one semester, for both subject content AND pedagogy. This out-of-field proportion was the equal fourth highest across all Key Learning Areas in 2023. Data on out-of-field teaching specifically for Asian languages is not available.

On 15 December 2022, all Australian Education Ministers agreed to the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan to address teacher workforce issues. The Action Plan sets out 27 actions in five priority areas: improving teacher supply; strengthening initial teacher education (ITE); keeping the teachers we have; elevating the profession; and better understanding future teacher workforce needs. The actions included an additional 4,036 Commonwealth Supported Places in ITE; Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships for ITE students; the 'Be That Teacher' national campaign, and a second phase of the High Achieving Teachers (HAT) program.

There have been some recent positive signs in relation to the work to address teacher workforce shortages. The number of ITE commencements and completions are beginning to increase². The number of students commencing ITE (both domestic and overseas) grew by 14% from 2023 to 2024, increasing from 25,605 commencements to 29,188 commencements. This included a 10% increase in domestic commencements and a 61% increase in overseas commencements. Preliminary data indicates that commencements will increase again in 2025. Meanwhile, ITE completions also increased between 2023 and 2024, rising by 6% from 16,485 completions to 17,439 completions. This growth included a 4% increase in domestic completions and a 33% increase in overseas completions.

The challenge lies in increasing engagement in language learning and then in attracting those people into teaching to increase the pipeline of qualified language teachers. Employment-based pathways, such as the HAT program may be a way to attract Asian language speakers into the teaching profession.

The Australian Government's HAT program commenced in 2020 and supports alternative pathways into teaching for high achieving individuals, committed to pursuing a career in the teaching profession. Participants in the HAT program are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds with the knowledge, skills and experience that schools need. Participants are placed in teaching positions in Australian primary and secondary schools experiencing teacher workforce shortages. In schools, they receive a high degree of training and support while they complete an Australian accredited teaching qualification and develop into high quality teachers.

For example, Western Sydney University's pilot in the current HAT expansion pilots aim to develop primary and secondary school teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds who can work in schools identified as the hardest to staff in Western Sydney. The students receive a bursary of \$10,000 per year of study. Participants will be supported to take up opportunities for paid

² Higher Education Statistics Collection, Department of Education, 2025.

employment-based professional experience once they are conditionally accredited by the teacher regulatory authority in NSW.

Early childhood education

The Australian Government funds the Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program which introduces young children to languages other than English in an early learning setting. ELLA is a free digital language learning program, delivered by Education Services Australia (ESA) and is aimed at engaging young children in language learning in preschool and the early years of school.

The ELLA program is a key part of the Australian Government's commitment to support the study of languages other than English and creating an interest for later language learning. ELLA was developed in consultation with experts in languages, early childhood and technology and it aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum. Young children can learn 13 languages (aligned to the Australian Curriculum Languages with the exception of Auslan) via interactive, play-based applications (apps) to help develop their understanding of language and new cultures. There are currently 11 interactive apps in each language as well as learning resources, which draw on the interests of young children, such as celebrations, cooking experiences, art activities, building and role play.

The most popular languages are Asian languages – with the most popular language among preschools being Chinese (Mandarin) and Japanese being the most popular choice for Foundation to Year 2 students.

Evaluations of ELLA have demonstrated its success through increased participation rates and feedback from educators that the program has had positive impacts on children learning a new language³.

Since the release of the first ELLA app in February 2015, ELLA has grown from a pilot initiative and has had over 5,000 preschools participate in the program. In 2019 it expanded to include a trial of Foundation to Year 2 schools which allowed nearly 300 schools across Australia to participate. In 2025, ELLA is celebrating a decade of making learning a language fun, exciting and accessible for young children.

In the 2024-25 Budget, the Australian Government announced a \$34.6 million investment over four years (from 2025 to 2028) in the Teacher Resources Hubs (TRH) program. The TRH program continues the delivery of 6 initiatives, including ELLA, providing free, curriculum-aligned, evidence-based resources and professional development for teachers, school leaders and families nationwide. Through this funding, access to ELLA from 2026 will be expanded to all eligible Foundation to Year 2 Australian schools while also continuing access to all eligible preschools. The expansion will provide opportunities for more children across Foundation to Year 2 to learn about new languages and cultures and provide enhancements and improved accessibility to educators when using the apps. The ELLA expansion will also provide families and educators with access to more free language materials available on the ELLA website. For more information visit www.ella.edu.au/ella-program.

³ Deloitte Access Economics, (2016). ELLA 2016 Trial Evaluation.
<https://www.ella.edu.au/media/boihk535/2016-ella-evaluation-report.pdf>

Higher education

Higher education subject enrolment data from the department⁴ show there has been a steady decline in the uptake of Asian languages by domestic higher education students in recent years.

Subject enrolments in Eastern Asian Languages were steadily increasing up to a peak of 3,049 equivalent fulltime study load (EFTSL) in 2016. Since 2016, the total EFTSL has decreased every year, and had almost halved in 2024 at 1,790 EFTSL.

For subject enrolments in Southeast Asian Language studies, the EFTSL has decreased 75% over past 20 years (the length of our timeseries). In 2005 there were 523 EFTSL participating in Southeast Asian language studies, which is down to 130 EFTSL in 2024.

Subject enrolment in Southern Asian Language studies has been consistently low over the past 20 years, with 22 EFTSL in 2005 and 40 EFTSL in 2024.

The decline in subject enrolment in Asian Language studies is echoed across other languages studies such as Southern and Northern European languages. Students enrolling in and completing dedicated Asian language courses follow the same decreasing trends.

Languages are also taught at beginner through to advanced levels in the Australian higher education sector, including in universities – which are also the key source of trained language teachers for schools.

Australian Tertiary Education Commission

The ATEC commenced operations in an interim capacity on 1 July 2025, with legislation to formally establish the ATEC – the Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025 – introduced during the Spring 2025 parliamentary sitting period. The Government's intention is for the ATEC to be an independent steward for the higher education system, driving important reforms to grow equity participation and meet Australia's skills needs.

The ATEC will work in new collaborative ways with stakeholders to effectively steward the sector, including with providers, governments and government agencies. The ATEC will release a Statement of Strategic Priorities (SSP) every two years, which will outline the ATEC's priorities for the tertiary education system. The SSP will provide clarity on the ATEC's priorities, including national priorities to frame negotiations with providers through new mission based compacts.

Mission based compacts

Mission based compacts are intended to be four-year strategic agreements between the ATEC and Table A and B providers and will be one of the ATEC's key stewardship levers to drive a high performing and diverse higher education system that delivers on national priorities. The ATEC will manage compacts from 2027.

⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, Higher Education Student statistics collection, (2024). The data refer to students undertaking units of study classified to disciplines in Australian standard classification of education codes 091511 Southern Asian Languages, 091513 Southeast Asian Languages, 091515 Eastern Asian Languages. An individual unit of study in an undergraduate degree for a semester usually equates to 0.125.

Through compacts, it is proposed providers will be able to demonstrate how they are responding to national level priorities outlined in the ATEC's SSP, with each provider able to demonstrate their contributions in different ways and aligned to their unique mission and context.

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.

The ATEC would take a system-wide view when assessing how national priorities are being achieved across all compacts, and can incentivise ambition toward national priorities through its available levers.

People-to-people education and research linkages

International education is a key feature of many of Australia's strongest international partnerships. The people-to-people and institutional links fostered by education help underpin Australia's bilateral relationships in Asia. As at July 2025, enrolments from Asia comprised 91.4% of all international student higher education enrolments in Australia, with 9 of Australia's top 10 source markets for students in Asia, reflecting the deep education ties Australia has in the region.⁵

People-to-people and institutional linkages fostered through international education also help to prepare the next generation of Australians to engage in our region - building knowledge of the languages, cultures and history of our neighbours. This is important for our future prosperity, security and influence in our region.

In a changing geopolitical and security context, sovereign capabilities are becoming increasingly important. Australia's sovereign capabilities require those working on regional issues to have a well-developed understanding of Asia. Alongside the STEM pipeline, increasing global awareness, Asia literacy, and fluency in Asian languages is part of developing sovereign capability.

The government works with universities to provide language and cultural learning opportunities through exchange and student mobility programs such as the New Colombo Plan and the Destination Australia Cheung Kong Exchange Program. In 2019, one in four Australian undergraduate students participated in a learning abroad program (or 58,058 students), which was an increase of 11% on 2018 figures and nearly 400% from 2009. In 2019, Asia remained the top destination region for learning abroad experiences with almost half (48%) undertaken in Asia (highest numbers in China and Japan).⁶ However, these would have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australian Government provides OS-HELP loans for students enrolled in a Commonwealth Supported Place who want to study part of their course overseas. OS-HELP may be used to cover expenses associated with

⁵ Australian Government Department of Education, (2025). *International Students - Monthly Summary 2016-2025 (July 2025)*, [International student monthly summary and data tables - Department of Education, Australian Government](#)

⁶ Australian Government Department of Education, (March 2021), Higher Education Students Studying Abroad in 2019, https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/Documents/RS_%20HE%20student%20mobility.pdf

the overseas study, such as airfares, accommodation and other travel or settling expenses, supporting mobility for students who want to study in the Asia region.

As outlined in *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, we are committed to working with partners in Southeast Asia to increase education collaboration and support them in reaching their education and skills goals, including on programs delivering on Recommendation 55. Consistent with the strategy, the Australian Government has also encouraged publicly funded universities to increase their engagement (including exchange of students) with Southeast Asia as part of the implementation of the managed growth setting (further information below). This, in turn, supports building Asia capability in Australians through engagement with their peers from the region and exposure to new perspectives and experiences.

Counsellor network

The department maintains an offshore Counsellor Network which is fundamental to maintaining our close ties with bilateral partners and in supporting mobility opportunities for students, workers, and researchers. The department's Counsellor Network can assist in supporting opportunities for providers looking to engage in the Asia region, including through mobility exchange and business ventures.

Of the department's ten Offshore Network positions, eight are currently located in Asia across Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, India, Japan and China. Counsellors maintain high-level government-to-government linkages and collaborative networks with education and research communities throughout the region. They implement Australia's international education strategies overseas and have a deep understanding of international regulatory and policy developments to enhance opportunities for Australian education providers. They foster linkages and facilitate two-way student mobility with in-country agencies, institutions and organisations across a range of areas of national interest.

The Counsellors are supported by an invaluable group of Locally Engaged staff, who have a wealth of local knowledge, cultural awareness, foreign language skills, and strong network of stakeholders in-country.

The department also works across government, including with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Education, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and Austrade, to facilitate greater opportunities for education engagement with Asia.

Transnational Education

Australia is a global leader in the provision of transnational education, particularly in Asia, and the transnational education sector has an important role to play in building Australia's Asia capability. Australia's transnational education footprint in Asia spans across the schools, vocational and higher education sectors and includes a diversity of delivery models such as overseas branch campuses, collaborative programs and innovative online offerings. These types of arrangements enable regional integration of education offerings, which builds new people-to-people linkages and institutional partnerships that enable cultural exchange and provide mutual benefits for Australia and its partners in the region.

Of Australia's 20 established branch campuses, 17 are located in Asia and 10 are specifically in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia. While many of Australia's international branch campuses have, up to this point, primarily focused on providing to local students in their country of establishment, there is significant opportunity to leverage these campuses as a mechanism for greater outbound mobility of Australian students overseas. Such deepened engagement would provide a platform for Australia to continue growing the cultural capability and awareness of its citizens within the region.

Beyond physical branch campuses, universities also engage broader efforts for Australian students to increase engagement with Southeast Asia through various other types of transnational education arrangements, including:

- semester exchange arrangements;
- collaborative degree programs such as twinning, joint and dual degrees that often involve periods of study at both an onshore institution and an offshore institution; and
- research engagement through cotutelle programs and researcher exchanges.

Arrangements of this nature likewise provide a platform for Australian soft diplomacy, the development of new people-to-people linkages and enhanced cultural exchange with the Asia region. However, there remains opportunity for greater engagement of the alumni associated with these arrangements.

ASEAN Research Collaboration Internship Program

The ASEAN Research Collaboration Internship Program (ASEAN Program) is a successful initiative in advancing Australia's engagement with Southeast Asia. Over three rounds in 2025 and 2026, the ASEAN Program will support more than 100 early career researchers from ASEAN nations to undertake short-term, commercially-focused research placements at Australian universities or host institutions.

Early indications are very positive that the program is establishing lifelong research links between young up-and-coming researchers from across Southeast Asia with Australian counterparts. It also helps build Asia capability by embedding understanding of Asia perspectives and priorities among the Australian research community. The program fosters enduring research relationships, promotes knowledge exchange and develops solutions to shared challenges facing our region. This helps sustain Australia's ability to engage with Southeast Asia in the long-term while also building lifelong capabilities for both regions. The success of the ASEAN Program presents a direct economic opportunity for Australia as it enables the potential to drive commercial outcomes through research partnerships. One example is the decarbonisation and sustainable hydrogen production research project with Indonesia, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne.

Southeast Asia prioritisation in managed growth settings

Consistent with *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*, the government has prioritised increased engagement with Southeast Asia as part of the implementation of managed growth settings in international education. This increased engagement can build people to people links and two-way cultural exchange with the key aim of building Asia capability. Universities have been recognised for their continued investment and engagement with Southeast Asia through growth to their international student allocation in 2026.

Growth in allocations recognises universities that already perform well above the sector average for onshore international students from Southeast Asia. The allocation process also encouraged universities to make tangible commitments to increase the number of onshore Southeast Asian students from 2026 onward, for example, through providing additional university-supported scholarships reserved for students from Southeast Asia in 2026.

Transnational education engagement in Southeast Asia, including overseas branch campuses, also plays a vital role in extending the reach and reputation of our higher education system across Southeast Asia and build our relationships offshore. Universities' investments in campuses in Southeast Asia have been recognised through growth in international student allocations.

The government is committed to a high quality, resilient international education sector that supports sustainable growth and deepens our regional ties. In this context, international education remains central to strengthening Australia's long-term connections with Southeast Asia.

Mobility programs

The Destination Australia Cheung Kong Exchange Program (DACKEP) is a successful and longstanding joint initiative of the Australian Government and Cheung Kong Group that provides approximately \$1 million annual scholarship funding to deliver student mobility across Asia. Specifically, one of the outcomes of the program is to strengthen engagement between Australian universities and their counterparts in Asia, which contributes directly to the development of Asia capability and cross-cultural awareness.

DACKEP provides funding to eligible universities to offer scholarships for short-term mobility opportunities for outbound Australian students and inbound students from Asia. DACKEP includes in-country face-to-face language study as a focus of the initiative, as well as short term study, research, and practicums or clinical placements. The program strengthens Australia's connections with Asia, cultivating alumni networks and industry links in the region, and positions Australia as a partner of choice in international education.

Participating Asian countries include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China (including Hong Kong, not Taiwan), India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar (no participants), Republic of the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Since its establishment in 2021, four rounds of DACKEP have supported 413 inbound students from Asia and 679 outbound students from Australia to have short-term mobility opportunities. Round 5 of DACKEP will be delivered in the 2026 academic year. Universities provide scholarships for a minimum of 14 day and maximum of one semester, with the most popular destination and source countries being Japan, Korea and Singapore.

This program complements other Australia Government mobility initiatives, such as the New Colombo Plan (NCP), administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which provides opportunities for Australian undergraduate students to develop their Indo-Pacific capability and Asia literacy through immersive, structured learning and internships in the Indo-Pacific region.

Promoting the Benefits of Asia Capabilities and Languages

There is opportunity for government and business to work closely to promote the importance of developing Asia capability and to advocate for students at all levels of education to consider

language study. Promoting the potential employment benefits of language and cultural study to students is key to creating further interest, and building Asia capability.

Businesses seeking to work in Asia have the option of engaging with government departments at both the state and federal level, through initiatives such as those supported by Austrade.

Organisations such as Asialink also offer businesses the opportunity to develop “Asia-ready skills” – not just business strategies, but cultural awareness.

Student mobility programs can also have a significant impact on the employability of graduates and subsequently benefit businesses. A 2019 survey of alumni from Australian Universities who participated in learning abroad found 85% of respondents indicated that learning abroad had a positive impact on developing skills to support their professional role. Further, 59 per cent of respondents agreed that learning abroad had a positive impact on obtaining their first job in their field of study.⁷ Promoting these impacts to students who have not previously considered mobility programs or language studies will be key to encouraging interest and building Asia capability.

⁷ Potts, D. (2020), *Career outcomes of learning abroad: national report*, International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), <https://ieaa.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Research%20Publications/2020/PUB-IEAA-Career-Outcomes-of-Learning-Abroad-National-Report.pdf>