



23 September 2025

Re: Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education Inquiry into Asia Capability

Dear Committee Members,

I welcome this important inquiry into the development of Asia capability in Australia. I write in my capacity as Director of the Herb Feith Indonesia Engagement Centre at Monash University, but I begin with a personal story.

When I began university in 1994 as a first-in-family student, the University of Tasmania (Launceston) offered only one language—Indonesian. I knew little about Indonesia then and could not even locate it on a map. Yet the opportunity to study Indonesian was life changing. I fell in love with the language, the people, and the culture and just as importantly, with my fellow students and lecturers who shared a deep passion for Indonesia. That opportunity set me on a path to dedicate my career to Indonesian studies. Today, I am proud to lead the Herb Feith Indonesia Engagement Centre, where I teach Indonesian from beginner to proficient levels and work to promote Indonesian language and cultural learning.

We know the challenges around trying to increase declining interest in Indonesian language and culture. Many reports already highlight them:

- * Indonesia often suffers from a negative reputation in Australian media, discouraging students and parents.
- * Few parents and students are aware of the career opportunities that Indonesian proficiency brings.
- * Schools close Indonesian programs for short-term financial reasons.
- * The shortage of qualified teachers makes it difficult to sustain programs even where demand exists.
- * Unlike Korean and Japanese, Indonesian lacks the global cultural capital of K-pop and J-pop. At Monash, nearly 1,000 students study Korean each year, compared to around 20 graduating annually in Indonesian.
- * Businesses operating in Indonesia often undervalue Australian staff with language and cultural skills, preferring to hire Indonesians at lower cost.

Despite these barriers, the foundations for renewal are strong. Australia has invested stakeholders and institutions deeply committed to Indonesian studies, including Monash and the Herb Feith Indonesia Engagement Centre, ACICIS, the Australia-Indonesia Centre, the Australian Indonesia Institute, and importantly Australian university campuses such as Monash Indonesia. What is needed now is sustained, long-term government commitment. Short-term initiatives, such as two-week exchanges, are valuable but insufficient. Substantial and consistent funding, guided by clear national policy, is required to build capacity.

During the Hawke-Keating era, government leadership drove a step change in Asia literacy. The current moment demands similar leadership. The infrastructure, networks, and expertise are already in place.

With strong government backing, Australia can ensure Indonesian and broader Asia capability thrives across our schools, universities, and workforce.

On behalf of the Herb Feith Indonesia Engagement Centre, I offer our full support to the Committee and our willingness to contribute to this inquiry in any way possible.

Yours sincerely,



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