

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

Introduction

Language is the major key to building Asia capability. While the decline in the study of Asian languages is a subset of the general decline in foreign language learning at all levels of the education system – primary, secondary and tertiary, nevertheless, the negative impact of this general decline is most pronounced with regard to Asian languages, and Indonesian in particular. That said, the solution to the decline in Asian language learning may lie in the general promotion of all foreign languages of relevance to Australia. Private industry will not drive the necessary change. Nor will the States. The Commonwealth of Australia is responsible. After all, this is a matter of national importance.

Schools

- ☐ Foreign language learning should be mandatory in all of grades 3 to 6. This is the age when most children learn most rapidly, and uptake of a foreign language is easiest.
- ☐ Scaling of foreign languages at matriculation level exams (HSC, VCE etc) should be set at a level which properly rewards the academic effort required to master a foreign language. At present many students are discouraged from studying a foreign language because foreign languages do not scale as well as some other subjects.
- ☐ Academically capable students should be encouraged to undertake the International Baccalaureate (IB) as their matriculation qualification. This is an internationally recognised qualification and is superior to the Australian state matriculation qualifications (HSC, VCE etc). More significantly the IB requires the study of foreign languages. Many IB candidates would choose Asian languages.
- ☐ In order to encourage school trips to Asian countries , the Commonwealth needs to indemnify school principals and teachers in case of accident or illness.
- ☐ A number of Asian countries (China, Korea and Indonesia come to mind) are happy to provide teachers of their language at no cost. The Commonwealth needs to facilitate the employment of such teachers by easing visa requirements and subsidising accommodation and other living costs.

- The Commonwealth should fund Australian teachers of Asian languages directly bypassing the State bureaucracies.
- Reinstate NALSAS type funding for study of Asian languages.
- It is recognised that the above measures will create a demand for teachers of Asian languages in Australia. Relevant Asian language departments at Australian universities need to be supported in order to produce these teachers.

Commonwealth Public Service

- Foreign language ability must be a prerequisite for any graduates seeking employment in DFAT. Apparently, this is not the case at present.
- Other Commonwealth agencies with an international outlook (AFP, Immigration, Defence etc) should be required to maintain a large pool of employees with Asian language ability
- The ABC in particular should be required to maintain a pool of reporters with Asian language ability. The fact that the ABC sends to countries like China and Indonesia reporters who cannot speak or understand the languages of those countries is an absolute embarrassment.
- The Commonwealth should encourage the study of foreign languages by its' employees by extending the payment of language allowances to any employee who is fluent in an Asian language. This should be independent of department or supervisor approval.

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