



Submission:
**Inquiry into building Asia
capability in Australia through
the education system and
beyond**

International Education Association of
Australia (IEAA)

November 2025

1. About IEAA

The International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) is Australia's leading association for international education. Our growing membership numbers 3,000 members from 275+ institutions and organisations across Australia and globally. Through these members we have access to a large community of international education professionals working in Australia and abroad in higher education; technical and vocational education; as well as English language, schools and non-award programs.

IEAA empowers professionals, engages institutions and educates local and international communities about the benefits of international education. Our mission is underpinned by three pillars: **advocacy**; **professional learning**; and **research**.

IEAA provides advocacy services relevant to professional staff and educators across all sectors of international education. We deliver high-quality professional learning to enhance the quality of Australian international education. This is delivered through [nine member-led networks](#): admissions & compliance; learning abroad; marketing & recruitment; pathways; scholarships & fellowships; student life; teaching & learning; transnational education; and young professionals. IEAA also drives [new research](#) to highlight emerging trends in international education, to solve problems and to inform policy.

IEAA is governed by a [Board](#) of volunteer directors, representing all sectors of international education, and supported by a small secretariat. Research and other projects are usually administered by IEAA's [Research Committee](#), which also comprises volunteer members who are thought leaders and experts across diverse facets of international education.

Further information about IEAA, can be found on our website: <https://www.ieaa.org.au/>

2. IEAA's connection to building Asia capability in Australia

International education is a key conduit for Asia capability in Australia through:

- International students who choose Australia as their study destination, the majority of whom come from nations in Asia; and
- Australian students who undertake learning abroad experiences in Asia as a part of their formal education, including those who participate in programs funded by the New Colombo Plan.

Asia capability is also a key skill required by IEAA Members as they work to facilitate this two-way flow of students between Australia and Asia. Of the approximate 955,000 international student enrolments in 2025 (year to date in August), nearly 82% are from Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and Southern and Central Asia ([Department of Education](#)). IEAA members across all education sectors welcome, support and educate these students, which requires active Asia capability. Indeed, at least two-thirds of IEAA's current Board Members have deep expertise of Asia, including time spent living and working in Asia and proficiency in a diverse range of Asian languages, and fifty per cent of IEAA's Secretariat speak Asian languages (Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese).

In 2025, 'Southeast Asia engagement' has become even more significant to IEAA Members who work for Australian public universities. Under the Australian Government's '[Managed Growth for International Education – 2026 Arrangements](#)' Australian public universities wishing to increase their

allocation of new overseas commencing students (NOSC) need to demonstrate Southeast Asia engagement through alignment to '[Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040](#)' (the Moore Report).

The Australian government has also signalled the need for more offshore delivery of higher education by Australian universities through offshore campuses and other partnerships. For Australian transnational education operations in the Indo-Pacific, this requires deep Asia capability, particularly because this is where education providers from the United Kingdom are market leaders. IEAA also advocates for the recognition of Australian school curricula in Asia to be treated on par with transnational education operations in terms of exempting enrolled international students who wish to progress to Australia to continue post-secondary education (see 3.4 below).

3. IEAA's recommendations to the Inquiry

IEAA recognises that the work of the House Standing Committee on Education into the 'Inquiry into building Asia capability in Australia through the education system and beyond' is broad. Our submission focuses on four key areas:

- 3.1** Relevant research undertaken by IEAA with Asia Society Australia in 2022 which focused on Australia-Asia youth engagement;
- 3.2** Advocacy for and continuation of the New Colombo Plan which is administered through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT);
- 3.3** Allocation of funding to ensure Australian school students can access Asian languages and Asian studies education in primary and secondary schools across Australia; and
- 3.4** Recognition of the significance of Australian school curricula delivered in Asia and exemption from the national planning levels (NPL) for international students who successfully complete these qualifications and wish to progress to Australia to continue their post-secondary education.

These are further outlined below.

3.1 Relevant research undertaken by IEAA with the Asia Society Australia

In 2021, [Asia Society Australia](#) commissioned IEAA to undertake a series of 'Generation Asia Reports'. Through this project, three reports were published which focus on Australia-Asia youth engagement:

- [Keeping Connected](https://asiasociety.org/australia/generation-asia-report-keeping-connected) (<https://asiasociety.org/australia/generation-asia-report-keeping-connected>) was released in April 2022;
- [Asia Literacy and Employability](https://asiasociety.org/australia/generation-asia-report-asia-literacy-and-employability) (<https://asiasociety.org/australia/generation-asia-report-asia-literacy-and-employability>) was released in September 2022; and
- [Championing our Talent](https://asiasociety.org/australia/generation-asia-report-championing-our-talent) (<https://asiasociety.org/australia/generation-asia-report-championing-our-talent>) was released in December 2022.

Importantly, Australian Census data was used in these reports to explore Asian language usage by Australians aged 18 to 35 years outside of formal education environments. In 2022, we [found](#):

- The proportion of Australians – including citizens and non-citizens, across all age groups – using languages other than English at home, including Asian languages, is growing.
- 410,000+ Australian citizens, aged 18 to 35 years, use an Eastern, Southern or Southeast Asian language at home, which is more than the combined population of Hobart and Darwin.

- In NSW, VIC and the ACT, at least 1 in 10 Australian citizens, aged 18 to 35, use an Asian language at home.
- Nationally, the most used Asian language at home by Australian citizens aged 18 to 35 years is Mandarin, followed by Vietnamese, Cantonese, Punjabi and Hindi. Tagalog and Filipino, when combined, account for nearly 31,000 language users which would place them fourth nationally.
- The usage of Asian languages by young Australians differs across states and territories. Mandarin leads in the ACT, NSW, QLD and WA; Vietnamese in SA and VIC; Tagalog in the NT; and Nepali in TAS.

Other important findings include:

- Between 2014 to 2019, the number of Australian undergraduates studying in the Indo-Pacific increased by 83%, from 8,437 students to 15,440 students, with the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan a key driver.
- Only 21 out of 2,300+ postgraduate coursework programs offered by Australian universities offer an Asia-focused specialisation, highlighting an opportunity to support life-long learning opportunities related to Asia.
- 'Employability' is a useful framework through which to consider Asia literacy and employment in Australia. In addition to academic disciplines, Asia literacy is a set of achievements that enhance the employability of young people in Australia.
- There are opportunities for greater business engagement in young Australians' Asia literacy. We need to better understand demand for Asia literacy in Australian workplaces, particularly for graduate, entry-level and early career positions

[Ten recommendations](#) (see below) were formulated throughout the project, across all three reports, with a focus on innovation. IEAA continues to support these recommendations and urges the Inquiry to take these into consideration.

Monitoring trends	Recommendation 1: Expand the Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Indicators, as explored in Keeping Connected , to develop and implement an annual Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Index.
	Recommendation 2: Identify data sources and collect participation data regarding Australia-Asia Pacific youth volunteering, at least on an annual basis, in partnership with stakeholders such as education institutions, not-for-profit organisations and government bodies.
	Recommendation 3: Research the views of Australian employers, and specifically their human resources teams, to better understand workplace demand in Australia for Asia literacy, particularly for graduate, entry-level and early career positions.
Policy advocacy	Recommendation 4: Advocate for a broader definition of Asia literacy which encompasses the diversity of young people in Australia as well as Asia-related experiential learning programs, youth dialogues, internships, volunteering opportunities, paid work, digital exposure and other informal experiences.
	Recommendation 5: Advocate for multi-year, multilateral funding sources to support the work of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations, to foster collaboration between these organisations and to seed other youth-focused initiatives.
	Recommendation 6: Advocate for comprehensive employer education to be included in the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan to build greater awareness of this initiative within Australia's business community.
	Recommendation 7: Advocate for immigration settings which facilitate international students from across Asia and the Pacific to stay and settle in Australia post-graduation, in line with published skills shortages, and to access meaningful work and career opportunities.

Program innovation	Recommendation 8: Create an Asia literacy credential or ‘badge’ to be used by the following groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young people who live, study and work in Australia as they navigate their early careers. - Australian-based employers who value Asia literacy within their staff; seek Asia literacy in their talent attraction programs and for entry-level and early career positions; and offer professional development opportunities to build, develop and deepen Asia literacy.
	Recommendation 9: Develop programs which support life-long Asia-related learning opportunities beyond formal education, post-graduation and targeted at the early career stage of young people in Australia.
	Recommendation 10: Pilot a ‘reverse mentoring’ program through which Asia-literate young people can influence middle and senior management levels in Australian organisations.

3.2 Advocacy for and continuation of the New Colombo Plan (NCP)

IEAA and our Learning Abroad Network recognise that 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. The program has been successful for the past decade due to its initial co-design with universities. IEAA has been represented through our CEO, Hon. Phil Honeywood, on various NCP steering bodies since the program’s inception.

IEAA advocates for the continuation of the NCP and recognises the significant role it plays in developing Asia capability among Australian university students. We strongly encourage DFAT to continue to work with universities to ensure broad-based, equitable participation in the NCP. Furthermore, we also encourage stronger coordination between DFAT and the Department of Education with regards to the NCP, particularly as the NCP currently represents the Australia’s government’s largest investment in Asia capability.

In November 2024, IEAA made a [submission](#) to DFAT regarding the NCP. Our suggestions to DFAT are included in the Appendix of this document. Of particular and ongoing relevance in 2025 and beyond are the six suggestions below:

Suggestion 1: Consult with practitioners

- The program cannot function without the goodwill and administrative support of university learning abroad offices. Continuous consultation via the NCP External Advisory Group must explicitly engage practitioners in learning abroad to ensure future programs success.
- It would be beneficial for the NCP Secretariat to share annual draft guidelines with a stakeholder group of learning abroad practitioners to ‘test’ if updates and changes work well when implemented. This includes the setting of crucial dates, to maximise student availability and home/host university academic calendars.
- We recommend to remove barriers and layers of bureaucracy that make the effective administration and award of grants challenging for small and busy offices. Sector/practitioner consultation processes can assist with identifying these barriers.

Suggestion 3: Support academic champions

- The program also needs to encourage and reward the academic champions who have gone above and beyond normal workloads to envision and lead NCP programming, often without recognition.
- An annual award ceremony and work to create a best practice and benchmarking community of NCP academic champions would be a great way to re-establish goodwill with the academic community.
- Considering new 4-week program duration, allow an allocation of program funding toward teaching salaries (currently not funded) to enable faculty to participate.

Suggestion 4: Engage and consult host communities

Community ability to support four-week programming has not been considered in the recent decisions. Host communities consulted have expressed concerns about hosting for a longer duration and may be unwilling or unable to accommodate students for extended periods, especially in less financially resourced rural and regional locations.

- NCP and DFAT to socialise changes in host countries through diplomatic posts, to allow community awareness of the re-aligned goals, especially language learning options, and to allow them the ability to consider options and the advantages to hosting Australian students can bring to them.
- We recommend a framework to provide additional funds within grants to support Pacific and other less resourced host communities in receiving student cohorts.

Suggestion 5: Block fund university language teaching

Raise the economic return to faculties to teach regional languages. NCP should support additional language teaching 'block funds' as incentives to universities, to attract the interest of Deans and planners and enable them to create degrees with language study options that over time may lead to increased diversity.

Suggestion 7: Simple, assured funding for language study

Develop streamlined process for semester or longer exchange experiences in language and culture. Institutions to simply estimate longer-term grants required by country, and commit to NCP compliance, guidelines and goals.

Suggestion 12: Ensuring access by diverse cohorts

Ensure continued access for diversity cohorts by allowing some flexibility in program duration, specifically a limited exemption for transformative 2-to-3-week programs that have high participation rates by the following target groups:

- Indigenous students;
- Low-SES students; and
- Rural and regional students.

3.3 Allocation of funding to ensure Australian school students can access Asian languages and Asian studies education in primary and secondary schools across Australia

As outlined in 3.2 above, IEAA recognises that structural issues regarding Australian university students' uptake of Asian languages and Asian studies stems from school education. The NCP alone is unlikely to change this or to motivate Australian school students to take up an Asian language or Asian studies.

Instead, pathways and pipelines are needed between and across Australian schools to ensure the continuity of specific Asian languages and Asian studies education. This also needs to occur within specific school regions. For example, a student should be able to commence study of an Asian language during primary school or early secondary years and continue their study of this same language into senior secondary schooling.

IEAA advocates for the allocation of new funding for Australian schools to establish or maintain on-campus Asian languages and Asian studies programs. This could be modelled on the former National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS, 1995 – 2002) or the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP, 2009 – 2012). Like NALSAS and NALSSP, this work must be coordinated federally and tie funding to the tracked performance of individual states and territories. Previously this was implemented through the Council of Australian Government (COAG) and must now be implemented through National Cabinet.

3.4 Recognition of the significance of Australian school curricula delivered in Asia and exemptions from the national planning levels (NPL)

The Australian government has recently implemented exemptions from the NPL for international students transitioning from secondary school studies in Australia to tertiary study (higher education or VET). No exemption, however, has been provided for international students completing Australian school qualifications offshore, the majority of whom are in schools located in Asia.

IEAA notes that other key student destinations, including Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, have positioned themselves strongly in markets across Asia and benefit from the large number of schools, particularly in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, delivering Canadian, British and American curricula in-country. Research shows that this creates a robust pipeline for tertiary education enrolments to these key study destinations. This is an area in which Australia needs to be more competitive.

IEAA recommends that the Australian government recognise the significance of Australian school curricula delivered in Asia and implement exemptions from the NPL for international students who successfully complete these qualifications and wish to progress to Australia to continue their post-secondary education. International students who come to Australia via this pipeline will make strong contributions to Australia's Asia capability. Offshore delivery of Australian school curricula also requires deep Asia capability on the part of Australian state and territory school curriculum authorities and education boards.

Should the Committee require any further detail regarding the information presented in this submission, please contact: **Hon. Phil Honeywood, Chief Executive Officer, IEAA:**
phil.honeywood@ieaa.org.au / 0409 964 363

Appendix: IEAA's submission to DFAT regarding the NCP, November 2024

These are also available online:

<https://ieaa.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Advocacy/Government%20Submissions/2024/IEAA%20Learning%20Abroad%20Network%20submission%20-%20NCP%20Consultation%201Nov2024.pdf>

Indo-Pacific capability and literacy	
Suggestion 1	<p>Consult with practitioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program cannot function without the goodwill and administrative support of university learning abroad offices. Continuous Consultation via the NCP External Advisory Group must explicitly engage practitioners in learning abroad to ensure future programs success. It would be beneficial for the NCP Secretariat to share annual draft guidelines with a stakeholder group of learning abroad practitioners to 'test' if updates and changes work well when implemented. This includes the setting of crucial dates, to maximise student availability and home/host university academic calendars. We recommend to remove barriers and layers of bureaucracy that make the effective administration and award of grants challenging for small and busy offices. Sector/practitioner consultation processes can assist with identifying these barriers.
Suggestion 2	<p>Fund practitioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow 10% program administration funding to be used for administrative salaries (currently not permitted) to boost the quality of program administration. Introduce administration funding to enable delivery of NCP Scholar support (currently not funded).
Suggestion 3	<p>Support academic champions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program also needs to encourage and reward the academic champions who have gone above and beyond normal workloads to envision and lead NCP programming, often without recognition. An annual award ceremony and work to create a best practice and benchmarking community of NCP academic champions would be a great way to re-establish goodwill with the academic community. Considering new 4-week program duration, allow an allocation of program funding toward teaching salaries (currently not funded) to enable faculty to participate.
Suggestion 4	<p>Engage and consult host communities</p> <p>Community ability to support four-week programming has not been considered in the recent decisions. Host communities consulted have expressed concerns about hosting for a longer duration and may be unwilling or unable to accommodate students for extended periods, especially in less financially resourced rural and regional locations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCP and DFAT to socialise changes in host countries through diplomatic posts, to allow community awareness of the re-aligned goals, especially language learning options, and to allow them the ability to consider options and the advantages to hosting Australian students can bring to them. We recommend a framework to provide additional funds within grants to support Pacific and other less resourced host communities in receiving student cohorts.
<p>Asian / Indo-Pacific language learning</p> <p>We commend a renewed focus on engaging students with language learning. However, structural issues involving a lack of primary and secondary school Indo-Pacific language programs in</p>	

Australia, as well as limited appreciation of regional language skills by Australian business, are unlikely to be addressed by offering NCP funding for language study.

Additionally:

- There is limited pedagogical or practical return for students to take a four-week program for a 'different' regional language not already taught at university level.
- Institutions often do not have capacity to teach languages as funding models, degree structures and accreditation requirements do not encourage faculty to start offering them.
- Universities may have no degree-embedded elective subjects to offer 'for credit' to enable regional language studies.
- Partners in host locations do not offer 4-week language program options in Summer/ Winter School.
- Students considering longer-term language focussed programs will need NCP funding 'guaranteed' up front to be encouraged to consider longer-term experiences. Annual funding rounds are not a good way to operate in this space.

Suggestion 5	Block fund university language teaching Raise the economic return to faculties to teach regional languages. NCP should support additional language teaching 'block funds' as incentives to universities, to attract the interest of Deans and planners and enable them to create degrees with language study options that over time may lead to increased diversity.
Suggestion 6	Non-credit language options Many students may be interested in language learning but are unable take for-credit courses. NCP could consider removing the compulsory credit requirement for supported language programs to enable more flexible, shorter-term language immersion programs.
Suggestion 7	Simple, assured funding for language study Develop streamlined process for semester or longer exchange experiences in language and culture. Institutions to simply estimate longer-term grants required by country, and commit to NCP compliance, guidelines and goals.
Long-term benefits	
Suggestion 8	Commission academic research There are range of expert faculty and research groups in Australia who conduct longitudinal research into the impact of Learning Abroad programs. NCP could announce a call, and commission a project to examine outcomes. NCP can readily provide data, completion reports, and connections to alumni, host communities, other inputs and propose research questions.
Alumni network While supportive, university learning abroad offices as key contacts for NCP Secretariat are not well resourced to support NCP Alumni program activities. Similarly, university alumni teams are not resourced to engage with NCP. To meet objectives, we recommend for NCP to engage better with all NCP students, Mobility Grant recipients and Scholars alike.	
Suggestion 9	Leverage DFAT links at home DFAT create 'Country Pages' that collate together all the varied engagement opportunities for that location in Australia that returnees can engage with. (events, networking, business councils, festivals, language programs etc). This should be shared with recently returned students welcoming them to the Alumni to keep them linked to the region. This needs to happen shortly after return.
Suggestion 10	Annual competition 'Back to NCP' NCP host a 10-year anniversary competition with significant prize (e.g. a free in country Language or other development program/experience) in the region.

	Alumni called to re-engage with the region by writing a reflection/submission for the competition. This competition could exclude NCP Scholars who already have these opportunities.
Suggestion 11	<p>Re-excite host locations NCP has relied on the goodwill and support of Host location communities across the region. Reward host organisations and community through some form of reverse of the above. A trip to Australia or similar.</p>
<p>Diverse backgrounds As suggested by practitioners since the release of the 2025 guidelines, to foster diversity NCP needs to consider exemptions for specific cohorts. 72% (AUIDF Learning Abroad benchmarking survey 2023) of students participating in an overseas experience take a program less than 4 weeks. Students from Low SES, Rural and Regional, Indigenous and First in Family backgrounds all face significant barriers to participating in Learning Abroad for longer time periods. Additionally, Faculty in areas like STEM, Design and Health are discouraged to submit longer term applications, so reducing diversity in terms of study areas on the program.</p> <p>The new guidelines will likely redirect funding to wealthy, aspirational students who were already planning on going on a semester or longer exchange to the region (e.g. Language, Social Sciences, Business, Law programs) away from more diverse faculty cohorts.</p>	
Suggestion 12	<p>Ensuring access by diverse cohorts Ensure continued access for diversity cohorts by allowing some flexibility in program duration, specifically a limited exemption for transformative 2-to-3-week programs that have high participation rates by the following target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous students • Low-SES students • Rural and regional students • Traditionally non-participating groups