

National Curriculum Inquiry

ASAA submission to the National Curriculum Inquiry

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Australia is a unique country. It has a deep and valuable European heritage, a growing interaction with Asian countries and a population that mixes migrant and indigenous peoples. Its economic and strategic future is closely linked to Asia and increasing numbers of Australians will live and work in Asia. As Australian companies become increasingly oriented to the Asia region they will require 'Asian literate' employees.

It is imperative that school curricula reflect our heritage, our multiculturalism and our geographic, economic and strategic engagements with Asia. An essential part of education of our children must be to have 'Asia Capabilities'. A contemporary Australian Curriculum must include explicit Asia content to deliver these capabilities.

The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) is the peak body of university educators and experts on Asia. It has long sought to promote a deeper understanding of Asian countries through supporting the development of new school curricula. Its University members have two direct interests in what the Australian Curriculum does and what it produces. First, university courses are based on assumptions about what an adequately prepared and liberally educated Australian student knows about the Asia region. Second, they seek to identify, prepare and train the next generation of Asian experts who will enhance Australia's human capital.

All educated Australians need a basic knowledge of the Asian region. Study of Asian countries and of Australia's relations with Asia must be an integral part of the curricula for learning areas in the humanities and social sciences. Much remains to be done. Experience shows that an express commitment to knowledge of Asia – such as the cross-curricular priority, or other appropriate mechanisms – is required. The ASAA strongly supports the work of the Asia Education Foundation in the professional development of teachers and in the creation of materials for use in the classroom

Beyond these basic skills, Australia will only be prepared for the future if it has experts with deep knowledge of our largest trading partners, closest neighbours, and strategic allies. Two foundational elements delivered by the Australian Curriculum for developing these future experts are language training and time in the region. The Australian Curriculum needs to provide choice for those students who seek to excel in areas of critical national need. A rigorous and comprehensive languages curriculum is crucial.

ASAA seeks explicit inclusion of core content about Asian countries in the Australian Curriculum.

27 February 2014