

Building an Asia-Literate Australia



An Australian Strategy for Asian Language Proficiency

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One of the key recommendations of the Australia 2020 Summit was the need to build Australians' proficiency in using and understanding Asian languages and cultures. The Summit Report which was presented to the government said:

'Asia literacy' ... [needs] to be mainstreamed into Australian society; knowledge of Asian and regional languages and society [is required] to enhance Australia's global engagement and national global intelligence ... a national strategic plan for mainstreaming Asian studies [is] needed.

Since the late 1980s, there has been a growing realisation in Australia that our increasing integration with, and dependence on the Asian region requires a more comprehensive ability to understand and converse with the societies of Asia. Yet despite this, our levels of monolingualism remain stubbornly high, and our capacity to teach and research the major Asian languages is eroding.

Several participants in the Australia 2020 Summit believed strongly that further work was needed to promote the study of Asian languages and cultures. As a result, the Griffith Asia Institute convened a working group to develop a policy paper outlining a comprehensive plan to build Australia's Asia literacy over the course of a generation.

Four phases of research underpin this report. Phase one was an extensive review of the current status of Asian language teaching and study in Australia. Phase two reviewed past programs promoting and funding Asian language study in Australia, including expert assessments of those programs. Phase three reviewed the policies and frameworks used by other countries to promote greater proficiency in foreign languages. Phase four collected impressions, feedback and suggestions from key stakeholders (students, teachers, principals, parents, language specialists, education officials), and tested the proposals in this report among this group.

This Report is not intended as a criticism of the Rudd government's National Asian Languages in Secondary Schools policy; we applaud it for resurrecting a national program to promote Asian language education. We intended to promote discussion of the need for a more comprehensive and extensive program of Asia literacy.

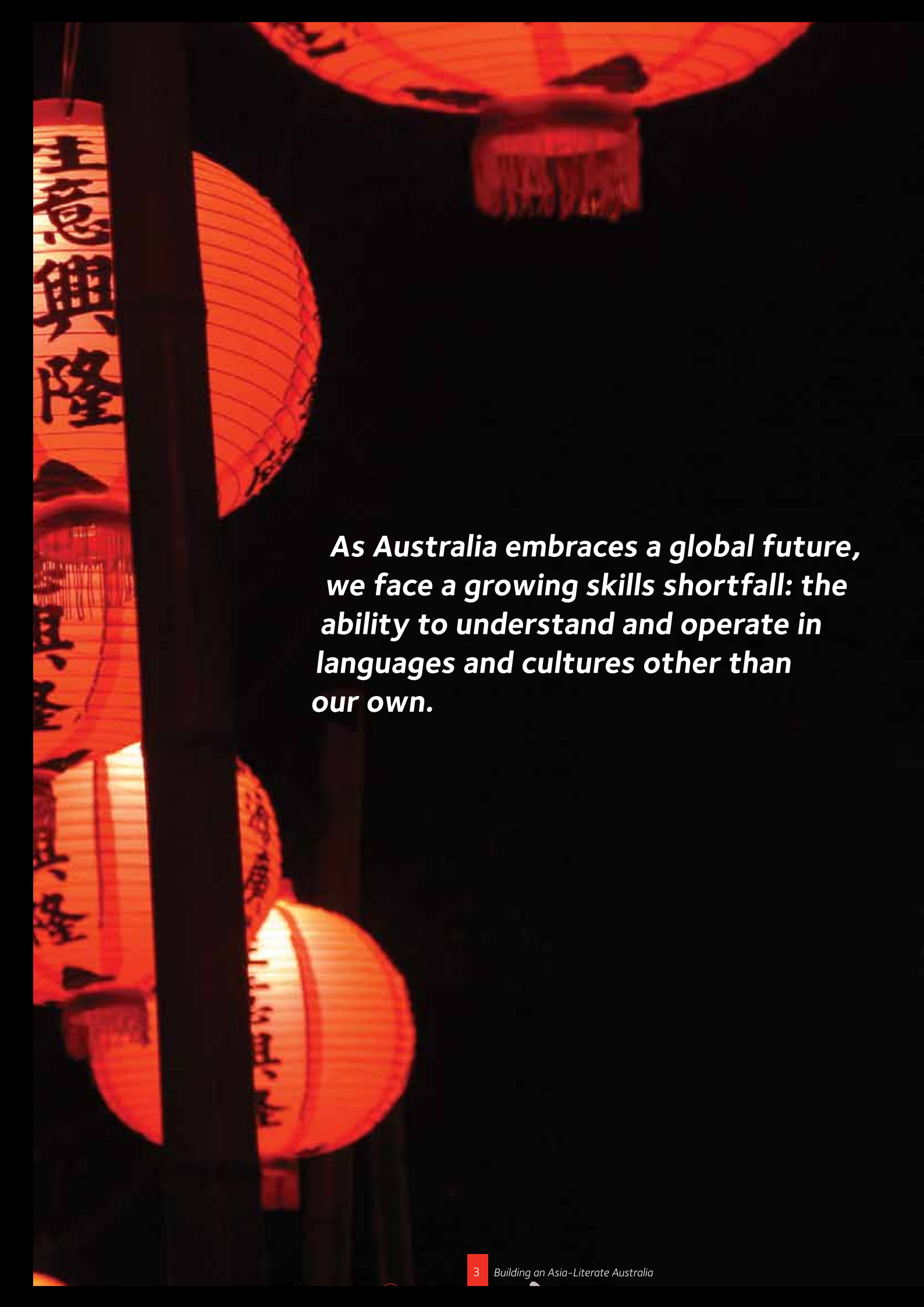
It may seem perverse to propose a major program of government spending in the midst of a global financial crisis. But what we propose is a program of spending on an infrastructure – our human infrastructure – that is every bit as important as the infrastructure targeted by the government's stimulus packages. Building Australia's Asia literacy offers the chance to position our society to make the most of the post-crisis world, to leave a lasting legacy so that Australia is better placed for the challenges ahead, rather than seeking to return to where we were.

Michael Wesley

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Key Principles.....	10
1. Implement a Comprehensive, Nation-wide, Long-Term Strategy.....	11
2. Teach Asian Languages and Cultures at All Levels of Education.....	13
3. Build Gradually with Quality.....	15
4. Build and Maintain Student Demand for Asian Languages Education.....	19
5. Build an Adequate Supply of World-Class Asian Language Teachers and Resources.....	21
Costings.....	24
Acknowledgements.....	26



***As Australia embraces a global future,
we face a growing skills shortfall: the
ability to understand and operate in
languages and cultures other than
our own.***

Australia's location, size and economic and social makeup mean that we will always be a global nation. Australia has the second-highest proportion of its people living and working abroad in the world.

Long-term trends show a steady internationalisation of our society and economy. Australia is becoming increasingly integrated into the dynamic region to its north. New, Asian powerhouses are rising. As China's and India's influence spreads, and Japan and Indonesia become major players, our region will increasingly conduct its business in the languages of the big Asian powers, and be shaped by their mind-sets and preferences.

In this context, we face a serious skills crisis. Australia is lagging further and further behind comparable nations in the international skills of its people. At the core of our continued prosperity and security as a global nation must be a capacity to understand and operate in languages, cultures and mindsets other than our own. Over three-quarters of Australians speak English only – making Australia the third most monolingual developed nation in the world.

Most of the world is multilingual, and investing more in learning other languages and cultures.

A monolingual Australia will fall further and further behind.

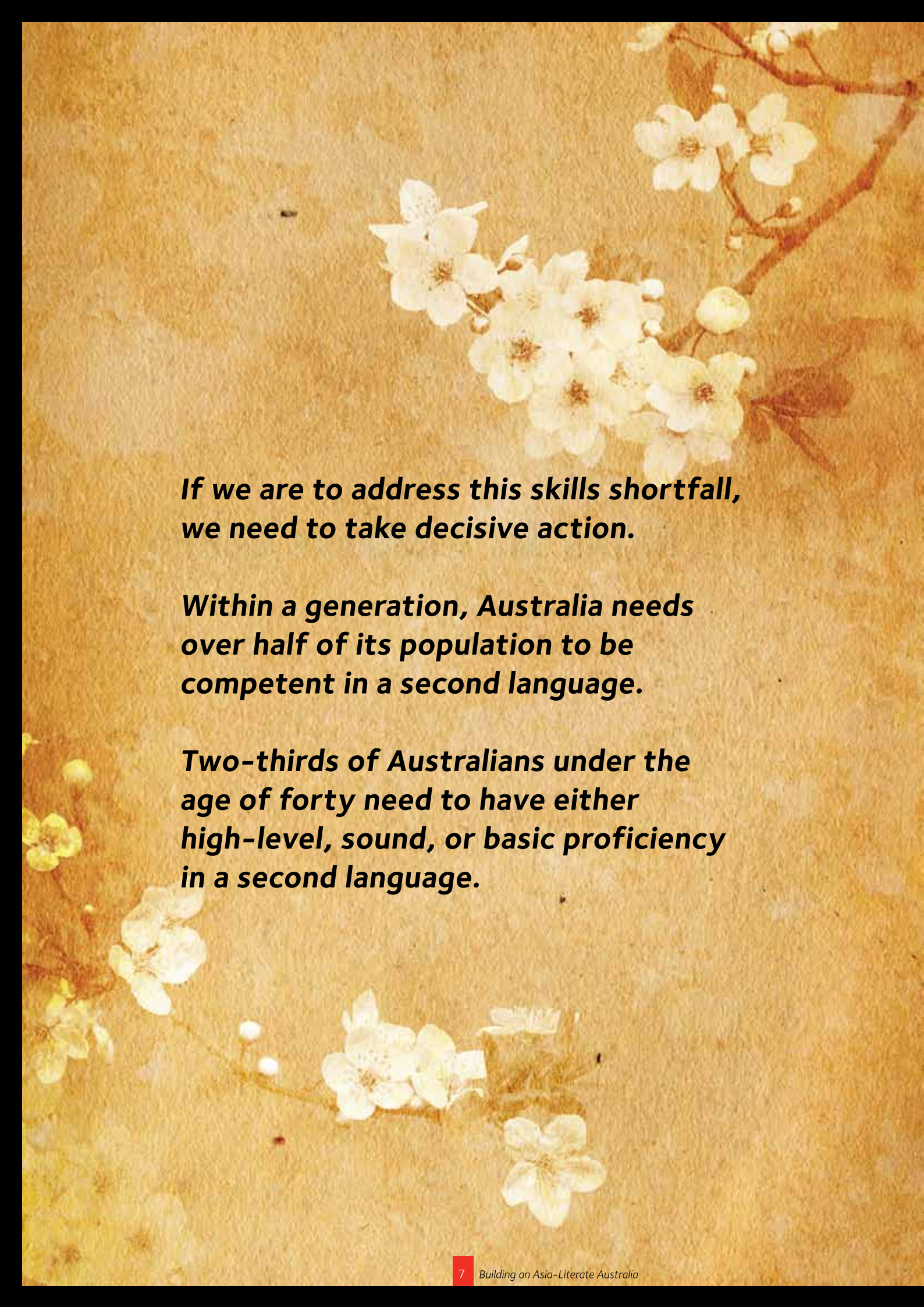


All of the world's most successful, stable and dynamic societies are increasingly embracing an international future — but unlike us, most have high proportions of citizens who speak several languages and can operate comfortably in cultures other than their own. The knowledge of more than one language gives a person an edge in judgement and competence. Qualified, multilingual competitors have an advantage against monolingual Australians in global companies and organisations.

With language and knowledge of the cultures, histories, societies of the people who use that language, comes a different way of seeing the world. The realization that there are other ways of seeing the world allows us to understand better the way we look at the world and react to it. Cultural self-awareness is a vital asset for Australians operating in a global realm across many cultures and languages.

It is true that more and more people around the world are learning English as a second language. But just because someone speaks to us in English doesn't necessarily mean they see the world as we do. Relying on others who speak English, or on interpreters, brings major disadvantages: we may miss crucial nuances or differences in meaning or intent.

Learning another language contributes significantly to communication and literacy skills in English. Language study enhances listening and speaking skills, deepens the understanding of grammar, and builds the ability to analyse, categorise, find patterns and express and defend opinions. Neurological research shows that bilingual speakers have denser brain tissue in areas of language, memory and attention than monolingual speakers.



***If we are to address this skills shortfall,
we need to take decisive action.***

***Within a generation, Australia needs
over half of its population to be
competent in a second language.***

***Two-thirds of Australians under the
age of forty need to have either
high-level, sound, or basic proficiency
in a second language.***

The Australian Strategy for Asian Language Proficiency that is proposed in this report will, within 30 years, quadruple the number of Australians studying an Asian language at the Preparatory, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels of education.

In 30 years, one-quarter of Australians in Grade 12 will be studying an Asian language and the culture it articulates.

One-third of these graduates will have a high level of spoken and written proficiency in their language of study; two-thirds will have a sound level of proficiency.

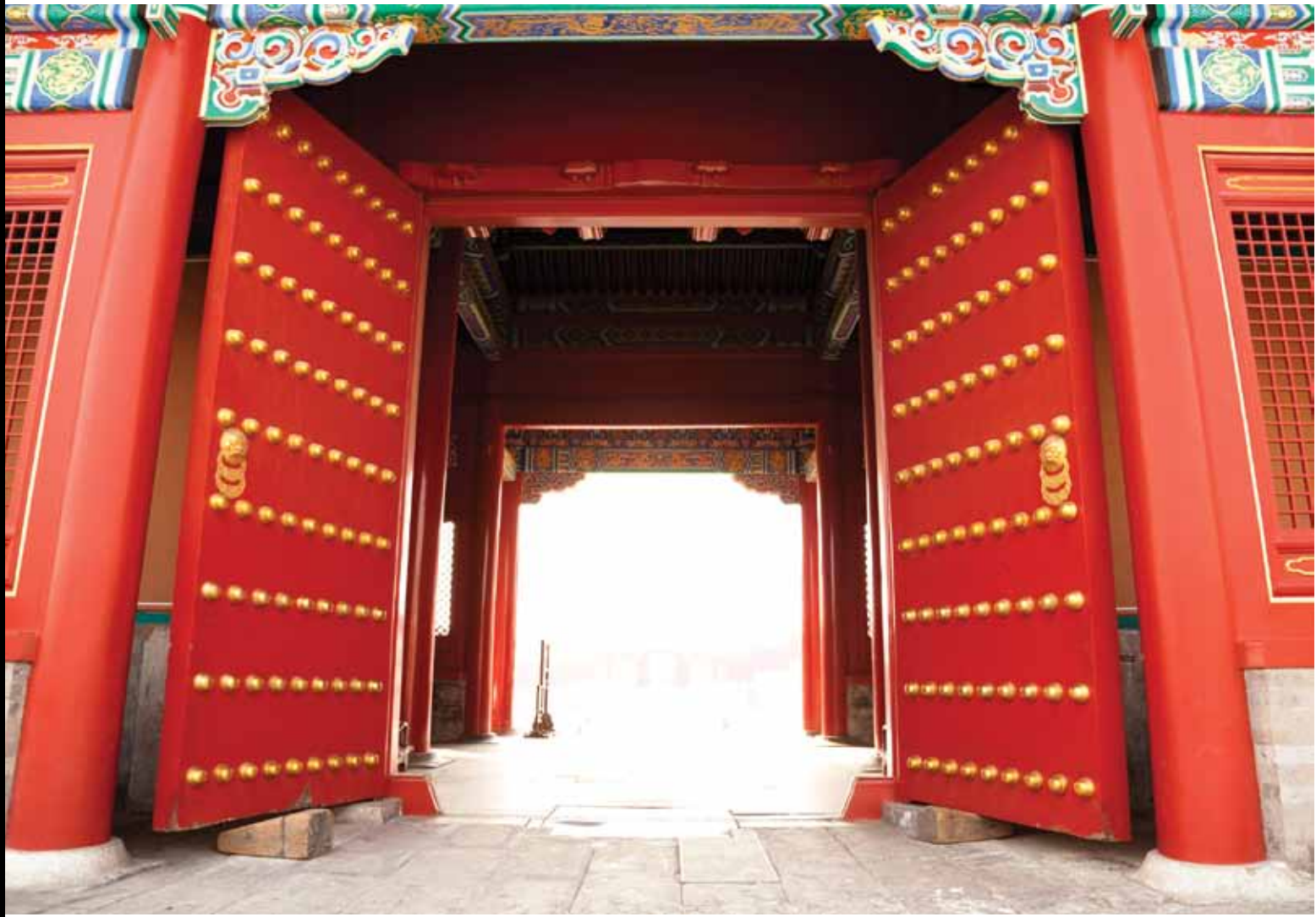
Over three-quarters of all students completing high school will have had the opportunity to study Asian language and culture (history, arts, literature, society and politics) during their schooling. They will have a basic comfort with Asian languages and cultures.

Beginning initially with the targeting of a small number of Asian languages is not an attempt to eclipse Australia's rich array of community languages, Aboriginal languages, or the study of European languages. We are a proudly diverse nation, and we must nurture the diversity of our linguistic resources.

The long-term intent is to increase the number of both Asian and non-Asian languages learnt and spoken by Australians. By facilitating a revolution in this country's attitudes towards multilingualism, a National Asian Languages Policy will benefit the study of non-target languages.

An Australian Strategy for Asian Language Proficiency requires funding over and above what is already being invested in languages education. It will not detract from languages currently being taught in Australian schools, colleges and universities.

Language is a gateway to culture. The Australian Strategy for Asian Language Proficiency will build on, and advance, the important progress that is already being made in embedding the study of Asia across the Australian education curriculum.



To properly address Australia's shortfall in Asian language proficiency, the Australian Strategy for Asian Language Proficiency must be built on five key principles.

- 1. Implement a Comprehensive, Nation-wide, Long-Term Strategy**
- 2. Teach Asian Languages and Cultures at All Levels of Education**
- 3. Build Gradually with Quality**
- 4. Build and Maintain Student Demand for Asian Languages Education**
- 5. Build an Adequate Supply of World-Class Asian Language Teachers and Resources**

1 Implement a Comprehensive, Nation-wide, Long-Term Strategy



All elements of Asian languages education must be integrated into a co-ordinated national plan that has bipartisan agreement among the Federal and State and Territory governments.

Commitment and funding models need to be agreed and locked in for at least 30 years.

An essential element of an integrated national strategy must be a sustained public awareness campaign designed to build public acceptance that proficiency in Asian languages is as basic to Australians' future skills needs as literacy, numeracy, or informational technology skills.

A National Asian Languages Institute should be established as a first step.

It should be based in Canberra and establish collaborative relationships with all Federal and State Education Departments as well as with all schools, colleges and universities participating in the Australian Strategy for Asian Language Proficiency.

The Institute should have a branch located in each State and Territory, and each State and Territory Branch should house a specific Action Group devoted to each of the target languages.

On a day-to-day basis, the Institute would:

- Be the central body charged with allocating funding and resources for the teaching of the target languages across Australia
- Ensure the co-ordination of all elements and successive phases of an Australian Strategy for Asian Language Proficiency
- Continuously review the implementation of the Strategy in participating schools, colleges and universities to ensure that the standards set by the national curriculum are being met
- Create a web-based Language Teaching Resource Bank to serve as a repository for best-practice techniques and materials that could be drawn on by language teachers across Australia
- Through language-specific Action Groups, visit schools to help 'problem solve' issues on the ground, link isolated teachers with supportive resources and other language teachers/associations, and keep teachers up to date with professional development funds and opportunities to improve their practice and opportunities to support each other's practice

2 Teach Asian Languages and Cultures at All Levels of Education



Asian languages and the cultures they articulate need to be taught at the Preparatory, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels of education.

Overwhelming evidence shows that the earlier children are exposed to a second language, the more interested and proficient they become in language acquisition. These early building blocks are crucial to maintaining students' commitment later in primary and secondary school, when other priorities and life pressures intrude. The formative years of education are foundational to nurturing a culture that embraces and understands the opportunities that the study of languages promotes.

A comprehensive Asia literacy program must simultaneously teach the culture which the language articulates. Learning the ambient culture of another language — pop culture, current affairs, music, art, internet, film — gives people a genuine linguistic and cultural literacy beyond simple competence in translating what they know into another language. Cultural exploration, via the internet, movies, music, cartoons, theatre, and art reinforces the learning of language.

Rebuilding language research and teaching in Australia's tertiary education sector is also a priority. Our tertiary institutions are where our language teachers are trained, including in the broad range of skills that mark real 'fluency' in a language and the cultural realm to which it gives expression. They are where our linguists hone their skills and expand their knowledge of the crucial ambient elements of fluency (the thought, history, arts, literature, politics and society of the linguistic areas they work on), including the importance of translation as a crucial skill. Universities are also the places where crucial research is conducted to improve language teaching techniques. The past decade has seen a precipitous decline in our Universities' and Colleges' capacity to teach and research languages; this decline must be reversed if Australia is to become genuinely Asia-literate.

The benefits of language study on English literacy and communications skills means that including languages study in primary and secondary school curriculums will not detrimentally affect student achievement in other areas and on basic skills development. It is likely that participating schools will see marked improvements in their students' performance in non-language subjects.

Close attention must be paid to ensuring continuity of instruction between levels of education, ensured by a detailed national syllabus for each Asian language taught.

Students must be able to study the same language at all stages of their education, and face minimal repetition, redundancy or jumps in instruction.

3 Build Gradually with Quality



A solid, sustainable program of Asia literacy must begin by initially teaching three target languages nationally: Japanese, Indonesian and Mandarin Chinese. These are the languages of our two biggest trading partners and our closest neighbour.

The Strategy must initially concentrate its resources on building a world-class program of Japanese, Indonesian and Chinese language teaching across all levels of education in a limited number of schools, colleges and universities.

Over time, it should expand the number of languages offered and the number of schools, colleges and universities teaching Asian languages, while maintaining close attention to quality and continuity of instruction.

Phase One will take five years.

It will see the building of world-class teaching of each of the target languages at in at least one Preparatory, Primary and Secondary school in each education district across Australia.

Schools and universities would be invited to bid for access to the funding and resources provided under the strategy. Those that are successful will need to make the following commitments:

- All students up to Year 10 will receive at least 150 minutes of instruction in the target language per week.
- Sufficient teachers, language instruction rooms and resources will be dedicated to the teaching of the target language.
- The teaching of the target language will occur within the framework of the national syllabus for instruction in the target language.
- Proper resources will be devoted to addressing the needs of students with different levels of language proficiency.
- Substantial commitment exists among key stakeholders: the Principal, other teachers, parents and students.

Scholarships and transport assistance will need to be provided to assist those families who want their children to learn a target language to attend those schools teaching it; and to assist families who don't want their children to learn the target language to attend other schools.

Participating schools, colleges and universities will be regularly reviewed by the National Asian Languages Institute, and their continued funding will depend on their meeting these standards.

Phase One aims, after five years, to have doubled the number of Preparatory, Primary and Secondary school students studying Japanese, Indonesian or Mandarin across Australia.



Phase Two will take ten years

Guided by a comprehensive review of Phase One, Phase Two will double the number of Preparatory, Primary and Secondary schools teaching Japanese, Indonesian and Mandarin in each education district across Australia.

It will also expand the number of target languages taught in each education district across Australia. At least one Primary and Secondary School in each education district will be funded to teach Hindi, Korean or Arabic.

Both the expansion in the number of languages taught and the number of institutions teaching them will maintain its focus on world-class standards of languages instruction.

Schools, colleges and universities will be invited to bid for Phase Two funding. Those which are successful will have made the same commitments as were made by successful institutions in Phase One.

Phase Two seeks, after 15 years, to have tripled the number of Preparatory, Primary and Secondary students studying an Asian language.

Phase Three will take fifteen years

Phase Three will begin with a comprehensive review of Phase Two. It will seek to double the number of institutions providing world-class instruction in Japanese, Indonesian, Mandarin in each education district across Australia.

It will seek to increase the number of institutions teaching Hindi, Korean and Arabic in each education district.

Phase Three will provide funding to increase the number of languages taught at all levels of education and in all education districts across Australia. Priority will be given to the most widely-spoken world languages outside of the target languages.

Phase Three will also provide funding for world-class instruction in more Asian languages, including Vietnamese, Thai, Farsi, Bengali, Cambodian, Lao and Burmese. Instruction in each of these languages will be funded only in education districts in which at least one institution at each level of education commits to the instruction of that language to the national standard.

Both the expansion in the number of languages taught and the number of institutions teaching them will maintain its focus on world-class standards of languages instruction.

Schools, colleges and universities will be invited to bid for Phase Three funding. Those which are successful will have made the same commitments as were made by successful institutions in Phases One and Two.

Phase Three seeks, after 30 years, to have quadrupled the number of Australian students at all levels of education studying an Asian language in each education district across Australia.

Phase Three also seeks, after 30 years, to have arrived at a point where multilingualism is regarded as natural and desirable among most Australians.

4 Build and Maintain Student Demand for Asian Languages Education



Most Australian students think studying Asian languages is too hard. But maths, science and English also require hard work: what needs to be changed is the widespread belief that language study is an elective, specialist option. Schools and universities should be encouraged to present multilingualism as basic to education as literacy, numeracy or computer skills.

Many students believe that studying an Asian language will drag down their tertiary entrance score. This perceived disincentive needs to be removed:

- Students should be able to have their language subject results disregarded in tertiary entrance scores if they believe they will have a detrimental effect on their overall score.
- Tertiary institutions should be required to maintain entrance quotas, accelerated study options and bursaries, HECS-waivers or discounts for students with advanced or sound proficiency in one of the target languages.

In-country study options should be re-thought and promoted to entice and motivate students, presenting them with opportunities to travel abroad safely and take part in enjoyable recreational and life experiences.

Schools, colleges and universities should be encouraged to develop and share ideas through the National Asian Languages Institute, and will be provided with funding to ensure students can access in-country learning opportunities at minimal personal cost.

Students need to be motivated also with regular evidence that they are making progress. All funded programs must be based around regular proficiency testing, but schools, colleges and universities must also be encouraged to build into their programs the opportunity for students to experience in practical terms advances in their spoken and written proficiency.

Schools teaching the target languages should be required to stream students according to their proficiency and needs. Assessment should be tailored to differentiate among streams and abilities and structured so that students in different streams are not competing with each other.

Rewards for student progress, such as recreational language resources and field trips, should be embedded at each level and within each stream. Maximum incentives should be provided to students to encourage them to qualify for advanced streams.

5 Build an Adequate Supply of World-Class Asian Language Teachers and Resources

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Participating schools, colleges and universities must be required to appoint adequate numbers of full-time, permanent language teachers, and to support them with adequate resources and infrastructure. A proportion of the funding they receive needs to be quarantined for this.

The number of quality language teachers qualified to teach at primary, secondary and tertiary levels needs to be built quickly.

More Australians need to be attracted to the vocation of language teaching. Scholarships and other incentives need to be targeted towards increasing the number of people undertaking tertiary degrees in language teaching. This includes providing incentives and opportunities to practicing teachers of other subjects to enable them to re-train as languages teachers.

Language teacher training should ensure that language studies are taken concurrently with teacher education studies, and that language teaching methodology units are language specific. Tertiary training needs to incorporate a unit or units of study based on a period of in-country experience, as a compulsory component of the languages teaching qualification – and funding and other incentives should be tied to this.

Tagged funding should be made available to colleges and universities to make places available for selected native speakers of a language who are not yet undertaking a full teaching degree to study language teaching methodology.

Language teachers need to be encouraged to structure their whole career around the teaching of language. Performance-based remuneration should be considered, as should regular sabbatical periods for further study, including in-country study. Language teachers should have the opportunity to undertake ongoing professional development in the teaching of their target language.

Language teachers can be supported by a centralized on-line language teaching resource bank administered by the National Asian Languages Institute, from which they can draw teaching materials, to which they can contribute ideas and successful course ideas and materials, and through which they can establish and maintain contact with the community of language teachers across Australia.

Teachers need ready access to the English-language literature about the language and culture they are teaching. Using the rich English-language resources available on the societies, politics, culture, and arts of Asian countries helps reinforce the teaching of language, through quickly building students' knowledge and understanding of the cultural realm they are entering.

Teaching languages well requires dedicated spaces and specialist equipment. Schools participating in the National Asian Languages Program should be required to allocate specialist language teaching rooms and equipment to the target languages and their cultural products (movies, TV, music, internet). Part of their funding should be tied to the provision of specialist teaching space and equipment.

Targeted funding should be directed towards supporting research in languages teaching, particularly favouring research projects with practical applications in improving the quality of language teaching.



Building an Asia-literate Australia will not be cheap

But as long as Australian governments try to promote language study on the cheap, our monolingualism will endure, and we will fall further behind the many dynamic, multilingual countries.

Australia has not skimped on investing in vital infrastructure in the past. Asia literacy is our most pressing human infrastructure priority: it demands serious and sustained investment and will offer far greater rewards.

We estimate that the Australian Strategy for Asian Languages Proficiency outlined in this report will cost \$11.3 billion over the course of 30 years.

Each of the three Phases in the Strategy requires investment in building capacity and institutions, as well as ongoing operational costs.

Phase 1 will cost approximately \$1.0419 billion over 5 years

Establishing the National Institute for Asian Languages	\$71 million
Tendering process for Phase 1	\$.5 million
Funding to participating schools	\$25 million
Salaries for language teachers and teacher aides	\$769.6 million
Training for tertiary language teaching and research	\$165 million
In-country scholarships	\$10.8 million

Phase 2 will cost approximately \$3.15 billion over 10 years:

Operating the National Institute for Asian languages	\$95 million
Review of Phase 1	\$1 million
Tendering process for Phase 2	\$5 million
Teacher and teacher aid salaries	\$924 million
Salaries for additional teachers and teacher aides	\$1,700 million
Funding to participating schools	\$100 million
Funding for tertiary language teaching and research	\$305 million
In-country scholarships	\$20 million

Phase 3 will cost approximately \$7.135 billion over 15 years:

Operating the National Institute for Asian languages	\$140 million
Review of Phase 2	\$1 million
Tendering process for Phase 3	\$7 million
Teacher and teacher aide salaries	\$2,500 million
Salaries for additional teachers and teacher aides	\$3,700 million
Funding for participating schools	\$300 million
Funding for tertiary language teaching and research	\$457.5 million
In-country scholarships	\$30 million



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The views expressed in this report are not the official policy of Griffith University, nor are they necessarily the views of those consulted.



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