

**Australian Consortium for ‘In-Country’
Indonesian Studies (Acicis)
submission to the
*Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in
Australia through the education system and
beyond***

November 2025



Introduction

1. The [Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesia Studies](#) (Acicis) provides this submission to the 'Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia through the education system and beyond' as **Australia's leading supplier of study abroad programs to Indonesia for university students.**
2. Acicis is a non-profit consortium which now comprises 19 Australian 'member' universities and one university based in the Netherlands which partner with eight host universities in Indonesia. Acicis was established in 1994 in Perth as an innovative mechanism to overcome barriers for Australian university students to study in Indonesia by leveraging economies of scale. Through our consortium model, almost 5,000 Australian students have lived, studied and undertaken internships in Indonesia through a diverse range of programs from two weeks to two semesters in duration.
3. From our inception in the 1990s, **Acicis has been the product and outcome of four decades of Indonesia-focused scholarship at Australian universities.** Acicis was the innovation of Australia's second generation of Indonesia-focused area specialists--the first generation of such scholars to be homegrown. The founding generation of Indonesian studies in Australia had largely been imported from the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, or trained abroad at Cornell in the USA in the 1950s. Acicis was, indirectly, also the product and beneficiary of the Australian Government's investment of ~\$500 million into Asian languages and studies education in schools between 1995 and 2002 through the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) program.
4. In turn, **Acicis has played a significant role in training Australia's third generation of Indonesia specialists**, who are now mid-career and populating our diplomatic missions in the region and the Indonesia-focused sections of various Commonwealth departments and agencies: including DFAT, ONI, CSIRO, Defence, ASD and other intelligence agencies. Acicis alumni also now lead, teach and research at many of the Indonesian studies programs at the 13 Australian universities where such programs still exist.
5. On current trends, however, Australian universities are **unlikely to succeed in cultivating a fourth generation of Indonesia expertise.** The Australian Government's withdrawal of funding and lack of policy leadership since the end of the Rudd Government's National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) in 2012 has seen **the study of Indonesian drop by 52% at Year 12 level since 2010 nationally; and at the tertiary level by 76% since 2004.** This decline has significantly weakened the structural foundation that Acicis was founded to complement.

6. [Acicis staff](#), alumni and [Reference Group](#) members are [active advocates for Indonesia literacy in Australia](#) and **Acicis itself has played a significant organisational role in producing many of Australia's Indonesia-literate and Indonesia-capable talent over the past 30 years.** It is from this organisational perspective and expertise that we offer insights and recommendations to this Inquiry.
7. In providing this submission, Acicis recognises the [significant body of existing reports, literature and initiatives](#) which have addressed Australia's Asia capability and Asia literacy since the early 1970s. This is not a new 'problem' and we advocate that the *existing*, albeit disconnected, Asia capability infrastructure in Australian education systems be maintained. Relevant examples of good practice models are referred to in our recommendations below. **Acicis leadership believes that to move Australia's Asia capability forward, we need to create a surgical system of interventions and 'stepladders' rather than a broad-based approach** that assumes all young Australians are Asia incapable or Asia illiterate.
8. An additional complexity for the work of this Inquiry is that Indonesian language and Indonesian studies, as well as other Asian languages and Asian studies education, should not only be conceived of for 'beginners'. **Rather, they should account for a range of existing Asia knowledge, capability and experience and recognise existing diasporas within Australia.** For example, different types of learners should include:
 - beginners;
 - those living in homes where a specific Asian language/s is used alongside, or instead of, English;
 - those who may have had some exposure to an Asian language or Asian studies through other types of formal or informal exposure, such as participation in a New Colombo Plan mobility project or scholarship; and
 - adult learners, including those who are studying at the postgraduate level within universities as well as graduates and those at the 'early career' level.
9. In this submission, we make ten recommendations based on four areas:
 - A. Cross-sector strategies and initiatives;
 - B. Strategies and initiatives for schools;
 - C. Strategies and initiatives for higher education; and
 - D. Strategies and initiatives for post-education and early careers.

These ten recommendations focus on deploying existing government mechanisms/ enablers and providing examples of helpful, relevant good practice models that the Committee can draw from in their work to identify system-level reforms and structural enablers to support the development of Australia's Asia capability.

Should the Committee require any further information about these mechanisms and examples, please contact Liam Prince, Acicis Consortium Director, via l.prince@acicis.edu.au

A. Cross-sector strategies and initiatives

Recommendation 1

- i. Australia's Asia capability should be addressed through a **National Agreement on Asia Capability** which brings together decision-makers from the federal Department of Education as well as state and territory level departments of education and which ties federal funding to performance within states and territories. Cooperation across *all* levels of government is essential for meaningful change to be implemented nationally. Examples of National Agreements which address critical issues from within and beyond education include:
 - [*The National School Reform Agreement*](#); and
 - [*The National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness*](#).
- ii. Acicis also advocates for the **inclusion of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade** in such a National Agreement. The New Colombo Plan, which currently represents Australia's greatest investment in building Asia capability (\$51 million annually) is under DFAT's remit and could be more effective and efficient if it were better connected to the administration and coordination of Australia's education systems.
- iii. As part of a National Agreement on Asia Capability, an **Asia Capability Data Repository** should be established to ensure collection, analysis and publication of agreed data items, including:
 - Participation/enrolment data in specific Asian languages and in Asian studies at Australian universities, secondary schools and primary schools (and not just Year 12, as is the currently the case);
 - Census data regarding the use of specific Asian languages in Australian homes by age and/or education level as well as by state and territory; and
 - The release of this data, and relevant analysis, to public audiences on an annual basis.

Note: The [first public hearing](#) for this Inquiry noted multiple data gaps regarding participation/enrolment in Asian languages across year levels and schooling systems (other than at the Year 12 level) and for Asian studies. Indeed, Acicis plays a leading role in [collecting, analysing and publishing available language data in Australia](#) to fill these gaps. These data gaps impede efforts to understand the current situation and make informed decisions. The British Council's annual ['Language Trends'](#) reports provide a good practice model.

- iv. A National Agreement on Asia Capability should **plan and coordinate the delivery of pipelines / pathways** for Asian languages education *between* different education levels to ensure continuity of study for learners. For example, a student who has been able to learn Indonesian language in primary school or junior secondary school should have the option to continue their study of Indonesian, at the appropriate competency level, in senior secondary school and in tertiary education.

B. Strategies and initiatives for schools

Recommendation 2:

Invest in the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and [stalled efforts to harmonise language curricula](#) nationally. Agreement among even a few large states will open new opportunities for efficiencies and economies of scale in curriculum development; decentralised or online modes of teaching; and development of new teaching materials at a national level.

Recommendation 3:

Through the National Agreement on Asia Capability (see Recommendation 1 above), establish requirements for:

- i. Appointment of 'Asia Capability' representatives to boards of state and territory curriculum authorities ([NESA](#), [VCAA](#), [SCSA](#), [QCAA](#), etc) to provide leadership, to influence decision-making and to ensure priority and effect is given to ACARA's existing [cross-curriculum priority](#) of 'Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia'.
- ii. Funding to support additional Asian languages and Asian studies education consultants and professional resources within state and territory curriculum authorities ([NESA](#), [VCAA](#), [SCSA](#), [QCAA](#), etc.) and departments of education. This is an area of critical need. For example, in Western Australia there are currently just two staff members in such roles. They are in acute need of professional development, leadership and support in their task of coordinating language education across all Western Australian schools.

Recommendation 4:

In line with Acicis' existing advocacy work (for example, the [Pledge for Asian Languages in Australian Schools](#) which has 21 peak association signatories), provide new NALSAS/NALSSP-style funding for Australian secondary schools to establish or maintain on-campus Asian languages and Asian studies programs. For example, this could include five-year federal government seed funding to underwrite teacher salary costs for years 1 to 3, with 50% contribution in years 4 and 5.

Funding could also be allocated to support the national expansion of good practice models from individual states and territories, such as:

- Develop and pilot a national platform for the online and digital teaching of priority Asian languages into Australian senior secondary schools. This could extend the existing work of [SIDE](#) in Western Australia, the [School of Languages](#) in New South Wales and the [Victorian School of Languages](#).
- Establish a national secondary student mobility program to priority destinations in Asia targeted at Year 9 students. A national program could build upon the experience of the Victorian Department of Education's [Victorian Young Leaders](#) (VYL) program suite in China (which has run for more than 10 years), [India](#) (piloted in 2018/19) and [Indonesia](#) (piloted in 2019). This should also include specific funding to address issues associated with teachers' 'time off in lieu' (TOIL) which currently impedes the in-country delivery of such programs.

Recommendation 5:

Implement an 'Asian language bonus' nationally for the purposes of university admissions to incentivise Australian secondary students to commence or continue their study of an Asian language in Year 11 and 12. Enrolments in languages education in senior secondary years is impacted by two primary drivers:

- Concerns over subject scaling and adverse impacts on students' tertiary entrance scores; and
- Availability of languages pipelines/pathways as detailed in Recommendation 1(iv) above.

An 'Asian language bonus' could be implemented either via university admissions authorities in each state and territory (e.g. [UAC](#), [VTAC](#), [QTAC](#), [SATAC](#) and [TISC](#)) or by agreement among Australian universities. This intervention can build on the experience of similar Year 12 'LOTE bonuses' previously implemented in various Australian states and territories.

C. Strategies and initiatives for higher education

Recommendation 6:

Establish a bonded scholarship program for the training of new teachers of Asian languages and Asian studies in Australian secondary schools. For example, hypothecated scholarships via the New Colombo Plan could be allocated to candidates willing to train and work as teachers of Asian languages and Asian studies in Australian schools. These early career teachers could be matched to schools receiving federal government funding as described in Recommendation 4 above.

Recommendation 7:

Provide seed funding to *establish* as well as oncore funding to *sustain* national consortia-style approaches, including that pioneered and implemented by [Acicis with Indonesia](#), to focus on specific Asian languages programs and aligned country/cultural studies through relevant study mobility experiences in tertiary education.

Acicis has demonstrated that a consortia approach can leverage economies of scale to overcome barriers for Australian university students to live, study and intern in specific locations within Asia. We note that in 2016, the federal Department of Education and Training commissioned a [feasibility study](#) of a consortium-style approach to focus on Hindi language education, Indian studies and outbound student mobility experiences for Australian university students in India. Furthermore, in 2023-23 a budget commitment of \$4 million was made to establish a pilot in-country language skills program in Vietnam, for which DFAT considered the development of a consortium approach.

Recommendation 8:

Implement the following two funding mechanisms:

- i. Implement a demand-driven ‘carve-out’ to institutional Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding caps (maximum basic grant amounts - [MBGAs](#)) for Australian universities teaching Asian languages and Asian studies to Australian students. Demand-driven funding for the teaching of Asian languages and Asian studies will ensure that an Australian university receives the full Commonwealth (CGS) funding contribution for every Australian student enrolled in an Asian language course at their institution—regardless of where that university stands in relation to its CGS funding cap.

This could also be linked to the requirements to demonstrate ‘Southeast Asia engagement’ under the Australian Government’s [‘Managed Growth for International Education – 2026 Arrangements’](#). That is, Australian public universities wishing to increase their allocation of new overseas commencing students (NOSC) would need to demonstrate Southeast Asia engagement via the provision of relevant Southeast Asian languages and studies education to Australian students.

Example: Demand-driven carve-outs *already exist* to motivate Australian universities to [enrol First Nations and low SES students](#). The very same mechanism could also be applied to motivate universities to enrol domestic students in Asian languages and Asian studies courses. This would send a strong, system-wide signal to university senior leaders to preserve and/or establish Asian language and Asian studies programs to ensure ‘pipeline’ continuity referred to in Recommendation 1(iv) above.

- ii. Expand Commonwealth-supported places (CSPs) for postgraduate students enrolling in Asian languages and Asian Studies programs. Currently, only minimal CSPs in these types of programs offered by Australian universities are available which disincentivises students from continuing their study of Asian languages and studies to an advanced level, or from commencing these studies following a relevant New Colombo Plan experience in their undergraduate studies.

Good practice models to address other critical skills shortages through expanded CSPs include:

- o *To strengthen Australia's mental health system, the 2023-24 Federal Budget included [\\$91.3 million over five years from 2022–23](#) to address acute bottlenecks in psychology training pipelines, including providing up to an additional 500 postgraduate student places and growing postgraduate psychology courses over a four-year period. Through the [Postgraduate Psychology Incentive Program](#), the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing administers funds directly to Australian universities to facilitate the creation of additional psychology postgraduate places. In 2024, [22 universities received funding, resulting in the creation of an additional 146 postgraduate student places](#).*
- o *To expand Australia's sovereign workforce capability for the Australian nuclear-powered submarine program, in the 2023-24 Budget, \$128.5 million was allocated over four years for [4,000 additional commencing CSPs](#) at higher education providers for courses that support the skills requirements of the nuclear-powered submarine program. The Department of Defence has moved funds allocated under its 2023-24 Portfolio Budget Statement to the Department of Education to administer [nuclear-powered submarine student pathways](#). The Department of Education will administer funds directly to 16 participating Australian universities. These are [non-ongoing CSPs](#), which do not form part of the CGS.*

Recommendation 9:

For the New Colombo Plan, which currently represents Australia's largest investment into building Asia capability:

- i. Maintain the existing funding envelope of \$51 million per annum for undergraduate-focused streams of the New Colombo Plan in real terms, that is, index NCP funding envelope annually in line with Australia CPI inflation.
- ii. Implement Recommendation 51 of '[Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040](#)' (the Moore Report), that is, to establish and provide new funding for postgraduate and VET streams of the New Colombo Plan to increase student mobility to Asia by domestic postgraduate students studying at Australian universities and VET students. This is particularly important for Australian higher degree by research students who wish to undertake

coursework and fieldwork in Asia, now that the Endeavour scheme, which previously supported this, is [defunct](#).

- iii. Transfer administration of the New Colombo Plan to the federal Department of Education to leverage expertise and efficiencies associated with system-wide funding for study abroad, such as [OS-HELP](#).

Currently, the task of matching NCP semester and mobility grants to eligible Australian undergraduate students involves selecting between 2,000-3,000 of 800,000 domestic undergraduate students spread across 42 Australian universities. The allocation of this funding would be better administered centrally, at a national level, ideally by the Department of Education, rather than through the current DFAT administered project-based system. This would remove the need for 42 universities to apply for small packets of NCP grants and then to recruit eligible students within a set project period, which is inefficient and overly administered. The NCP's \$51 million funding envelope could be more efficiently allocated were it to operate more like an OS-HELP-style system-wide guarantee. An eligible Australian student intending to study in the Indo-Pacific could be assured of NCP funding support regardless of which Australian university they study at; and, similarly, the universities could be guaranteed funding for each domestic student successfully sent to study in the Indo-Pacific.

D. Strategies and initiatives for post-education and early careers

Recommendation 10:

Develop and invest in programs which support life-long Asia-related learning opportunities beyond formal education, post-graduation and targeted at the early career stage of young Australians, such as those identified in Recommendation 18 of [‘Invested: Australia’s Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040’](#) (‘Establish a new public and private sector multi-country program to arrange professional exchanges and internships in select industries at the company or organisation level’). Such programs are also called for in Recommendation 9 of [Championing our Talent](#), published by Asia Society Australia and the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA). Between September and October 2025, Acicis assisted to deliver a DFAT-funded, four-week, Jakarta-based [pilot program](#) of this nature (the ‘Australia Southeast Asia Professional Placements Program in Jakarta’).

There are very few examples of existing programs in this space, with the [Asialink Leaders Program](#) a unique, but boutique, offering. There are numerous ‘Doing business in’ style programs, such as those delivered through [Asialink Business](#), but most are pitched at the beginner level and do not account for the different learner profiles described in Paragraph 8 of the introduction section of our submission.

Links and references:

Introduction	Paragraph 1	Acicis website: http://www.acicis.edu.au
	Paragraph 6	Acicis staff: https://www.acicis.edu.au/about-us/#our-team
		Acicis Reference Group: https://www.acicis.edu.au/about-us/#reference-group
		Advocacy for Indonesia literacy in Australia: https://www.acicis.edu.au/blog/the-pledge-for-asian-languages-in-australian-schools/
	Paragraph 7	Significant body of existing reports, literature and initiatives: https://docs.google.com/document/d/14QEzswszDHeHswLwC8mNVO9mP96IW1VRhhjYanerwak/edit?tab=t.0
Recommendation 1	Point i	National School Reform Agreement: https://www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/national-school-reform-agreement
		National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness: https://treasury.gov.au/policy-topics/housing/housing-homelessness-strategy/national-agreement-social-housing-and-homelessness
	Point iii	First public hearing: https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/commrep/29047/toc_pdf/Education%20Committee_2025_10_29.pdf;fileType%3Dapplication%2Fpdf#search=%22committees/commrep/29047/0000%22
		Acicis’ role in collecting, analysing and publishing languages education data: https://www.acicis.edu.au/resources/
		British Council’s Language Trends reports: https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/research-series/language-trends
Recommendation 2		Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA): https://www.acara.edu.au/
		Stalled efforts to harmonise language curricula: https://theconversation.com/is-your-kid-studying-a-second-language-at-school-how-much-they-learn-will-depend-on-where-you-live-155219
Recommendation 3	Point i	NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA): https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/
		Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA): https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/

		School Curriculum and Standards Authority, Western Australia: https://www.scsa.wa.edu.au/
		Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA): https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/
		ACARA’s existing cross-curriculum priority: https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-year-10/cross-curriculum-priorities/asia-and-australia-s-engagement-with-asia-ccp
	Point ii	NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA): https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/
		Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA): https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/
		School Curriculum and Standards Authority, Western Australia: https://www.scsa.wa.edu.au/
		Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA): https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/
Recommendation 4	The Pledge for Asian Languages in Australian Schools: https://www.acicis.edu.au/blog/the-pledge-for-asian-languages-in-australian-schools/	
	SIDE in Western Australia: https://www.side.wa.edu.au/	
	School of Languages in New South Wales: https://nswschoollang.schools.nsw.gov.au/	
	Victorian School of Languages: https://web.vsl.vic.edu.au/	
	Victorian Young Leaders (VYL) program: https://www.study.vic.gov.au/en/global-learning-and-engagement/student-programs/victorian-young-leaders#china	
	VYL India: https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/site-4/new-education-initiatives-to-strengthen-ties-with-india-0	
	VYL Indonesia: https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/young-leaders-live-learn-and-explore-indonesia	
Recommendation 5	Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT) (UAC): https://www.uac.edu.au/	
	Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC): https://vtac.edu.au/	
	Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC): https://www.qtac.edu.au/	
	South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC): https://www.satac.edu.au/	

		Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC), Western Australia: https://www.tisc.edu.au/static/home.tisc
Recommendation 7		Acicis: https://acicis.edu.au/
		Feasibility study: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/asia/documents-la-trobe-asia/Pathways-to-India-Final-2017.pdf
Recommendation 8	<i>Point i</i>	MBGAs: https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-funding/commonwealth-grant-scheme-cgs
		Managed Growth for International Education - 2026 Arrangements: https://www.education.gov.au/download/19308/factsheet-managed-growth-international-education-arrangement-2026/41736/document/pdf
		First Nations and low SES students: https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/accord-202425-budget-and-myefo-measures/demanddriven-needsbased-funding#toc-demand-driven-needs-based-funding
	<i>Point ii</i>	\$91.3 million over five years: https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/building-the-workforce-to-make-mental-health-care-more-available-and-equitable
		Postgraduate Psychology Incentive Program: https://www.health.gov.au/news/558-million-for-grants-to-support-additional-postgraduate-psychology-places
		22 universities receiving funding / additional 146 postgraduate student places: https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-mark-butler-mp/media/government-invests-in-future-psychologists-fast-tracking-workforce-expansion?utm_source=chatgpt.com
		4,000 additional commencing CSPs: https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-funding/commonwealth-grant-scheme-cgs/nuclearpowered-submarine-student-pathways
		Nuclear-powered submarine student pathways: https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-funding/resources/nuclearpowered-submarine-student-pathways-program-guidelines
		Non-ongoing CSPs: https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-funding/resources/nuclearpowered-submarine-student-pathways-faqs
Recommendation 9	<i>Point ii</i>	'Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040' (The Moore Report):

		https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/invested-southeast-asia-economic-strategy-2040.pdf
		Defunct Endeavour scheme: https://internationaleducation.gov.au/scholarships/Scholarships-and-Fellowships/Pages/default.aspx
	<i>Point iii</i>	OS-HELP: https://www.studyassist.gov.au/financial-and-study-support/os-help-and-overseas-study
Recommendation 10		'Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040' (The Moore Report): https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/invested-southeast-asia-economic-strategy-2040.pdf
		Championing our Talent: https://asiasociety.org/australia/generation-asia-report-championing-our-talent
		Pilot program ('Australia Southeast Asia Professional Placements Program in Jakarta'): https://www.linkedin.com/posts/strategic-development-group_professionalplacements2025-professionalplacementsjakarta2025-activity-7386574888100229121-hkVv?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAABkLOAABiscLd1x9v-CnBPfRa9Q5Aa6oeSo
		Asialink Leaders Program: https://asialinkbusiness.com.au/program/leaders/
		Asialink Business: https://asialinkbusiness.com.au