



Asia Education Foundation

## **Asia Education Foundation Submission to Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper**

### **Summary**

Asia Education Foundation (AEF) is a highly respected national organisation located at Asialink at The University of Melbourne. AEF works with schools, educators, young people and communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific to build global competence, Asia and Pacific capabilities and intercultural understanding. AEF's Advisory Council, chaired by Professor Michael Wesley, Deputy Vice-Chancellor International, The University of Melbourne, includes senior representatives from all Australian state and territory Departments of Education, the National Catholic Education Commission, Independent Schools Australia, the Australian Secondary and Primary Principals Associations and leaders of Australia's national education agencies - ACARA, AITSL and ESA.

This submission addresses the Expert Panel's Reform Area 1 to strengthen Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates.

It argues that core content of Initial Teacher Education needs to reflect the curriculum teachers will be teaching. Australia's Ministers of Education have already agreed, and recently reaffirmed, that Asia literacy is a priority in our schools. All Graduate teachers need to be better prepared to deliver the Australian Curriculum and not just generic teaching skills like those in the discussion paper. This includes the Cross Curriculum Priorities and General Capabilities that will equip students to live and work in an inclusive, sustainable and connected world and a culturally diverse Australia. The submission provides evidence that there is a long-standing gap in ITE to prepare graduating teachers to teach the Cross-curriculum Priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and the General Capability of Intercultural Understanding.

The submission recommends two key actions:

1. Expand the Enabling Factors in ITE to include foundational understanding of the cultures of the countries of the Asia Pacific region and their engagement with Australia, and the General Capability of Intercultural Understanding, to meet the need for teachers to be confident and capable educators who can authentically embed the Australian Curriculum general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities in teaching and learning for all students.
2. Commission a scan of what is currently occurring in ITE to equip Graduate teachers with the knowledge, understanding and strategies to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum's three Cross-curriculum Priorities and seven General Capabilities in schools.

Reforming Initial Teacher Education to better include the Australian Curriculum Cross-curriculum Priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and the General Capability



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of Intercultural understanding needs urgent attention. The OECD's 2018 PISA assessment on Global Competence showed that 15-year-old Australians reported a low level of interest in learning about other cultures and were consistently outperformed by peers in Canada and Singapore in the global competence stakes.<sup>1</sup>

We need to act now or risk failing yet another generation of Australian teachers and their students.

### **Equipping young Australians for their future**

The rapid pace of globalisation and technology means that all young Australians need to be equipped at school with knowledge, skills and capabilities to connect to the world. Australia needs young people who can work together with their Asia Pacific neighbours to build thriving economies and who have the skills to address the global challenges we all share like climate change, conflict and inequality.

Australia's Ministers of Education have already agreed, and recently reaffirmed, that Asia literacy is a priority in our schools. The Australian Curriculum therefore recognises the specific importance of Asia to Australia in the Cross-curriculum Priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia which states:

*"Asia is our part of the world. Knowing, understanding and growing engagement with Asia are foundational for young people as Australia seeks to strengthen its ties in the Asia region. Australians require intercultural understanding, empathy and confidence to contribute to, and understand, Asia–Australia engagement."*<sup>2</sup>

The Australian Curriculum also includes the General Capability of Intercultural understanding expected to be achieved by every student by the time they leave school. The Australian Curriculum says:

*"Intercultural understanding encompasses the behaviours and dispositions that students need to understand what happens and what to do when cultures intersect. Through learning to value their own cultural perspectives and practices and those of others, young people are supported to become responsible local and global citizens. They are equipped for living and working in an interconnected world."*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://theconversation.com/australian-students-say-they-understand-global-issues-but-few-are-learning-another-language-compared-to-the-oecd-average-168073>

<sup>2</sup> <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-cross-curriculum-priority/asia-and-australias-engagement-with-asia>

<sup>3</sup> <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-general-capability/intercultural-understanding>



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Australia needs young people who are equipped to contribute positively to a diverse Australian society. Over half of all Australians are now born overseas and the top five countries of birth outside Australia are in Asia and include China, India and The Philippines.<sup>4</sup>

It's time our school curriculum better reflected who we are.

Training Graduate teachers who are Asia capable, possess intercultural understanding and have a regional and global mindset is essential to achieve:

- the goals of the Australian Curriculum
- the Australian Professional Standards for teachers, namely Standard 1 (Know students and how they learn) and Standard 2 (Know the content and how to teach it) and
- the Australian Government's goal to strengthen Initial Teacher Education.

### **Reform Area 1: How to strengthen ITE to deliver confident, effective, classroom ready graduates**

#### *Enabling Factors*

This submission strongly supports the Enabling Factors identified in the ITE Discussion Paper. We consider that they are essential for every future teacher including:

*"Having a foundational understanding of First Nations peoples, their cultures and perspectives, cultural responsiveness, family engagement and diverse learners to ensure teaching is being delivered in appropriate ways that are responsive to student need."<sup>5</sup>*

**However, AEF proposes that this set of enabling factors needs to be expanded if Graduate teachers are to be supported to adequately implement the Australian Curriculum and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in schools.**

The Enabling Factors need to include foundational understanding of the cultures of the countries of the Asia region and their engagement with Australia and the General Capability of Intercultural Understanding.

It is important to note that the Australian Curriculum is three-dimensional. It includes learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities. Together, the three dimensions set out essential knowledge, understanding and skills all young Australians need so they will be able to learn, contribute to and shape their world now and in the future.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 2021 Australian Census

<sup>5</sup> Teacher Education Expert Panel Discussion Paper, March 2023, Executive Summary p.2

<sup>6</sup> <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/f-10-curriculum-overview/>

ITE needs to ensure that it reflects this curriculum structure.

The Australian Curriculum Cross-curriculum Priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia states that "to know Asia and its diversity, students need an insight into the societies, beliefs, histories, cultures, languages and environments of the nations within the region. They need to develop understanding of the region's contemporary challenges and opportunities. Knowledge, understanding and active engagement between Australia and Asia counteract unintended assumptions and stereotypes, and build positive relationships when guided by critical thinking, respect and reflection."<sup>7</sup>

The Asia and Australia Cross-curriculum Priority has three organising ideas:

1. **Knowing Asia and its diversity** This emphasises the need to appreciate the backgrounds, experiences, stories, religions, beliefs and perspectives within and among the nations of the Asia region. It is supported by understanding Asia and Australia's interconnected environments, natural, managed and constructed, and the political, financial and technological systems that drive relationships.
2. **Understanding Asia's global significance** This examines the ways in which different significant nations in Asia have effected change. People are central to global developments, with human endeavour expressed through aesthetic, creative, political, economic and scientific pursuits. Highlighting key individuals, events, developments or nations reinforces how they have contributed to Asia's global significance.
3. **Growing Asia–Australia engagement** This includes the relationship-building contribution of Australians with Asian heritage and explores how active connections between students and Asia's diverse communities can be deepened. Interaction builds empathy, respects cultural and linguistic differences, and leads to collaborative opportunities and outcomes. These active connections provide the lived experiences of global citizenship for young Australians, including through popular culture, and nurture relationships that reflect the historical and contemporary interdependency of Australia and the nations of Asia.<sup>8</sup> Like the cross-curriculum priorities, the General Capabilities are an integral component of the Australian Curriculum. The General Capabilities equip young Australians with the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions to live and work successfully.<sup>9</sup>

The Intercultural Understanding learning continuum is organised into three elements:

1. Reflecting on culture and cultural diversity
2. Engaging with cultural and linguistic diversity
3. Navigating intercultural contexts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-cross-curriculum-priority/asia-and-australias-engagement-with-asia>

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/f-10-curriculum-overview/general-capabilities>

<sup>10</sup> <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/teacher-resources/understand-this-general-capability/intercultural-understanding>

While preparation to teach the General Capabilities of Literacy and Numeracy, and the Cross-curriculum Priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures have been a priority in ITE, with all pre-service teachers required to undertake some sort of learning in this area as part of their degree, there has not been the same focus on Intercultural understanding or Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and few pre-service teachers enter the teaching workforce with these skills.

### Evidence Base

The Australian Curriculum cannot be achieved without investment in building an Asia literate education workforce with intercultural capabilities.

The need to equip teachers to be Asia literate was recognised a decade ago by the Gillard Government who commissioned the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to undertake a report on *Asia Literacy and the Australian Teaching Workforce*. The report was undertaken by Deakin University and Asia Education Foundation. Its purpose was to inform future decision making for policy and practice by providing empirical, research-based evidence about the understandings, characteristics, enablers and needs of teachers and principals to deliver the Asia priority in the Australian Curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

An online survey of over 1300 teachers for the study developed a profile of Asia literacy in the teaching workforce. In addition to questions about teacher background and understanding, the survey also included open-ended questions, to collect teachers' views on teaching and learning for Asia literacy. In addition, an online survey of 432 principals developed a profile of Asia literacy amongst this group.<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of the data collected and analysed, the study argued that the Asia literate teacher:

- possesses expert knowledge of content, assessment strategies and pedagogy for teaching Asia related curriculum.
- demonstrates familiarity with a wide range of Asia related teaching resources.
- actively builds intercultural understanding.
- frequently, purposefully and seamlessly integrates Asia into the curriculum.
- uses ICT to connect their students with students in Asia.
- leads Asia related learning within and beyond the school.<sup>13</sup>

Across all teachers, the results showed that most teachers did not yet feel expert, with only five percent considering themselves 'Highly Accomplished' or 'Lead' teachers in this area and well over 50 percent considering themselves 'Beginning.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/asia-literacy-and-the-australian-teaching-workforce>.

<sup>12</sup> Asia Literacy and The Australian Teaching Workforce, Executive Summary, P 9

<sup>13</sup> Ibid Executive Summary, P 10

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Executive Summary, P 9

Given the need for Asia capable and interculturally competent Graduate teachers, ITE must incorporate pedagogical content knowledge that addresses these six features, all of which align to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, in particular Standard 1.3 (Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds) and Standard 2.1 (Content and teaching strategies of the teaching area).

The recommendations of the *Asia Literacy and the Australian Teaching Workforce* report were never actioned due to a change in the Federal Government in 2013. A key recommendation of the report was that:

*“Asia relevant content knowledge and skills be included in initial teacher education, to equip all beginning teachers with a strong basis for implementing the Asia priority in the Australian Curriculum.”<sup>15</sup>*

The AITSL report was informed by an earlier report into Asia literacy and teacher education commissioned in 2001 by the Australian Government as part of the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools (NALSAS) initiative. The *Scan of Studies of Asia Activities in Pre-Service Primary and Secondary Teacher Education* was undertaken by The University of Melbourne in partnership with Asia Education Foundation.<sup>16</sup>

The scan found that,

*Very few subjects directly related to the studies of Asia are taught in preservice teacher education programs. Whilst many students access subjects that include studies of Asia content, the vast majority of the subjects taught devoted 5% or less of the class time to content on Asia... Course content on Asia was focussed on areas such as multiculturalism, globalisation, cultural studies, education system comparisons and LOTE and ESL.<sup>17</sup>*

AEF submitted a proposal to the TEMAG Consultation on Initial Teacher Education in 2014 arguing the need to adopt the recommendations of the AITSL report to build an Asia literate education workforce but this recommendation was not taken up by TEMAG.

### **The urgent need for an up-to-date evidence base**

There has been no national investment to build Australia’s education workforce capacity to implement Asia capabilities for the past 10 years. In 2023, we don’t know what Asia knowledge or intercultural understanding students gain by the time they leave school as this data has never been collected. Similarly, we do not know what is occurring in ITE to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum’s cross curriculum priorities and general capabilities as this has never been monitored.

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<sup>15</sup> Asia Literacy and the Australian Teaching Workforce, 2013 p.13

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/docs/default-source/Research-reports/nalsaspreservice.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

<sup>17</sup> Scan of Studies of Asia Activities in Pre-Service Primary and Secondary Teacher Education, 2001, Executive Summary p.6



**This submission proposes that the Teacher Education Expert Panel commissions a scan of what is currently occurring in ITE to equip Graduate teachers with the knowledge, understanding and strategies to support the implementation of the Cross-curriculum Priorities and General Capabilities in schools.**

This is an essential first step necessary to inform further action to ensure that ITE is better preparing Graduate teachers to implement the Australian Curriculum and the Australian Professional Standards to equip their students with the skills and understandings they need for the future.

**AEF suggests a multi-level approach to embed the Asia priority and Intercultural understanding capability in Initial Teacher Education.**

1. All core subjects dealing with engaging diverse learners should include Asia-related examples. This ensures that all graduate teachers are exposed to culturally inclusive teaching and Asia-related knowledge within an evidence-based framework. The intention is not to develop expert content knowledge; rather, the skill of dealing with unfamiliar content about cultures and/or Asia to co-construct learning with students.
2. Asia examples/contexts should be included, where appropriate, in electives and/or specialisation subjects to ensure that teachers are familiar with how Asia capability can be developed in various learning areas.
3. Courses specific to Asian studies and languages should be developed to cater for those wishing to specialise.
4. The rapid increase in the use of technologies to connect schools around the globe has led to recent successful work building Professional Learning Networks and Communities of Practice among educators. These could be established in ITE programs with partner universities in the region. Pre-service teachers collaborating on shared action research projects (for example: better engaging girls in STEM, teaching for global competence, early years pedagogies and so on) would be an effective way to develop intercultural understanding, cultural knowledge and networks as well as general teaching skills and subject specific knowledge.
5. The Commonwealth Government's New Colombo Plan provides another possibility for extension with practicums and further study in Asia. Research indicates that working with schools and education systems internationally improves Asia capability and intercultural understanding. There is a large body of empirical literature on overseas study programmes and international school partnerships to support this. ITE providers need to invest in providing high-quality international experiences for pre-service teachers as part of their practicum.

One obstacle to achieving this may be the lack of relevant expertise among teacher educators, so cross-departmental and cross-institutional collaborations are essential.



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To support development of Asia capable teaching practice among Graduate teachers, ITE programs need to work collaboratively with schools that enact well Asia capable and culturally inclusive teaching. Asia Education Foundation's *What Works* research series also provides evidence-informed practice.<sup>18</sup>

*What Works* demonstrates how reflecting on evidence has led to improvements in teaching practice and student outcomes. It provides teachers, principals and teacher educators with frameworks and case studies for:

- building school demand for Asia literacy
- leading school change to achieve Asia literacy
- developing students' intercultural understanding
- using ICT to support development of Asia capabilities
- curriculum, pedagogic and whole-school reforms to achieve Asia capable schools
- building and sustaining international school partnerships
- study programmes to Asia to build teachers' Asia capabilities.

The shape of the Australian Curriculum was agreed to in 2009 with Learning Areas, Cross-Curriculum Priorities and General Capabilities making up the three dimensions of the curriculum. Ensuring adequate inclusion of all of these dimensions in ITE has never been required or monitored and the current situation is not known.

It's now long overdue to ensure that Graduate teachers are equipped to ensure that their students have the knowledge, skills, capabilities and dispositions to deliver an Australian Curriculum that prepares them to thrive in an interconnected world and can contribute to building a dynamic culturally diverse Australia.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/research-and-policy/what-works-series>