



ASIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

To: The Australian Curriculum and Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
Feedback on Draft F-12 The Australian Curriculum: Geography

From: The Asian Studies Association of Australia Inc (ASAA)

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The Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft F-12 Australian Curriculum: Geography to the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA).

ASAA acknowledges the syllabus' emphasis on geography as a particular form of inquiry which has the potential to develop students' curiosity and wonder about the diversity of the world's places and their peoples', cultures and environments. However, the ASAA is concerned that there is not sufficient emphasis on explicit content, and the development of related understandings and skills, that focus on the countries of Asia.

Australia's geography makes knowledge of Asia and ability to communicate with the people of Asia essential for our national wellbeing. This 'Asia priority' is identified and clearly emphasized in the agreed policy which informs the Australian curriculum project, and all other national and state education initiatives, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008). However, this emphasis on the significance of Asia for Australia, has not been realised in the current draft geography curriculum. For example, a preliminary analysis of the syllabus' content

statements indicates that only two statements refer to Asia. This lack of reference to Asia is particularly disturbing in the section of the document that refers to the curriculum in Year 11 and Year 12. It must be noted that a matriculating student who selected geography as one of their senior subjects could complete their secondary education without any geographic knowledge or understanding of Australia's neighbours in the Asian region.

So few references to Asia in terms of suggested content is seriously problematic as the *Melbourne Declaration* makes clear that all Australians need to become Asia literate whilst proposing that education should produce citizens who “are able to relate and communicate across cultures, especially in relation to cultures and countries of the Asia-Pacific” (MCEETYA 2008: 4). The *Declaration* clearly intends that Asia will receive considerable emphasis in the Australian curriculum. In particular, it notes that “India, China and other Asian nations are growing and their influence in the world is increasing. Australians need to become Asia Literate, engaging and building strong relationships with Asia” (op. cit.: 4). Moreover, the significance of Asia literacy for the development of young Australians’ geographic understanding is implied in the *Melbourne Declaration* by the reference to those “complex environmental, social and economic pressures such as climate change that extend beyond national borders pose unprecedented challenges, requiring countries to work together in new ways” (op. cit.: 5).

Currently, the draft F-12 Geography curriculum does not reflect this emphasis on Asia and it does not provide the opportunity for Asia literacy to be developed as an important component of geographical understanding. Most of the content statements in this document lack specificity and are too broad and generic to support the Asia priority. Concomitantly, the geography syllabus does not provide enough specific content that focuses on Asia to support the cross-curriculum priority: Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia. Similarly, the elaborations to this curriculum do not provide sufficient suggestions for the development of Asia-related content.

Our concern is that teachers who do not have much pedagogical or content knowledge related to Asia will not incorporate an emphasis on Asia in the curriculum. This concern is reinforced by that fact that the wording in the syllabus provides options *not to include Asia* (see for example, p. 26). Moreover, the curriculum lacks clear and specific references to the geographic diversity of Asia and of its increasing significance to Australia. In sum, under the auspices of this draft curriculum, geographic understanding about the Asian region will not be developed in Australia's education system.

The ASAA recommends first, that Asia-related content must be mandated in the geography curriculum. Second, the ASAA argues that mandated content needs to be expressed in terms that promote knowledge and understandings about the *diversity* of the Asian region. Where appropriate, this dual approach should be infused across the document to foster the development of the cross curriculum priority - Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia - and it should inform the insertion of Asia related content into each year level of the curriculum.

Our contention, that more emphasis should be placed on the nations of Asia as significant in understanding Australia's location in its region, not only reflects intention of the *Melbourne Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in Australia*. It also reflects many years of policy advocacy for the study of Asia in Australia and sustained calls for Asia literacy.

Consider, for example, the statement that Asia should not be an 'elective' in the Australian education system in the Asian Studies Council's (1988) *A National Strategy for the Study of Asia in Australia*; its reiteration in the 1994 Rudd Report, *Asian Languages and Australia's Economic Future*, A Report Prepared for the Council of Australian Governments on a Proposed National Asian Languages/Studies Strategy for Australian

Schools, and more recently in the Asian Studies Association of Australia's (2002) report *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge: Repositioning and Renewal of a National Asset*.

Asia is a major policy focus and this should be reflected in a substantial level of time and attention in the national geography curriculum. Presently, many young Australians are more likely to study aspects of geography that relate to Europe rather than Asia. The Australian curriculum offers the opportunity to redress this situation, but this opportunity has not so far been taken.

Other concerns focus on capacity building Australia's geography teachers to become Asia literate so they can embed the Asia priority in the curriculum. The reality is that many teachers are reluctant or unable to do this. These teachers have no knowledge and/or understanding of Asia's geography and cultures, given that they were educated through a largely Anglo-centric curricula. During the next decade, the teaching profession in Australia will be transformed as large numbers of teachers retire and new teachers enter the profession. Many of these beginning teachers also lack Asia-related geographical knowledge. Concomitantly, the national curriculum initiative has specific ramifications for the pre-service education of primary and secondary teachers of geography. If the Australian curriculum is to deliver on the Asia priority identified in the *Melbourne Declaration*, much more Asia related content needs to be embedded in the current Draft F-12 Australian Curriculum: Geography and some of this content should be mandated for study. Currently Asia literacy will not be achieved in this effort to secure a national approach to the teaching and learning of geography.

References

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