



Asia Education Foundation

Asialink Media Release

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Business calls for next generation Asia skills

Leading Australian businesses and industry organisations have joined forces to endorse a call for a greater Asia focus in the education of Australia's next generation.

Ms Heather Ridout, CEO of Australian Industry Group, will launch the Alliance at the Asia Education Foundation National Summit on Tuesday the 5th of May. "Once we come out of this economic downturn Australia will be looking to Asia as a core driver of our own recovery. Now is the time to be preparing so that we can be well placed to take advantage of that growth potential. Understanding Asia, knowing the languages, cultures, traditions, and teaching our children about our near neighbours is clearly essential for our future prosperity." Heather Ridout, CEO Australian Industry Group.

The new Business Alliance for Asia Literacy, made up of major corporations, peak associations including the Australian Council for Trade Unions, the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Industry Group who represent over 400,000 Australian businesses, is calling on Australian school communities, education systems and Governments to ensure that education in Asia skills and languages is a core part of Australian curriculum.

In a statement today to be presented to the Deputy Prime Minister, Ms Julia Gillard, the Alliance says Australia's future depends not only on our economic success but also on our ability to solve fundamental global problems.

"Asia is becoming more important to the global economy," the Alliance statement says. "Within 10 years, the region will have three of the four largest economies of the world."

The Alliance - formed under the auspices of Asialink at the University of Melbourne - says senior students must be given incentives to take up Asia studies, and teachers must be skilled and available to teach them. The group calls for adequate funding to ensure delivery of Asia studies within education systems.

Australia's current education statistics do not reflect the growing importance of Asia for Australia, the Alliance says.

"No education system requires schools to teach about the Asian region; 50% of schools teach very little about Asia; only 6% of Year 12 students study an Asian

language, and just 3% pursue these studies at University. Only 2.5% of Year 12 students study Chinese.”

In year 12 Modern History in one state, 2% of students choose to study China, while 65% choose Germany and 19% choose the Soviet Union. This is a typical pattern across states.

Vice-President of the Myer Foundation and Chairman of Asialink, Mr Sid Myer, says the Alliance’s call for action comes at a time of unprecedented global financial turmoil, “and it is more important than ever to prepare well for the future.”

“The question everyone is asking is: Can Asia cushion Australia from the shocks?” he said today. “It is clear no country will escape unscathed but so far as there is growth, the IMF forecasts it will be in Asia. Our hope for the next generation is that they will fully understand this region – and that our education systems do not let them down.”

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Signatories to the Business Alliance for Asia Literacy include:

Peak Associations

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Australian Council of Trade Unions
Australian Industry Group
Australian Services Roundtable
Business Council of Australia

Business Councils

Australia-ASEAN Business Council
Australia China Business Council
Australia India Business Council
Australia Indonesia Business Council
Australia Korea Business Council
Australia Malaysia Business Council
Australia Philippines Business Council
Australia Singapore Chamber of Commerce & Industry Ltd
Australia Taiwan Business Council
Australia Thailand Business Council
Australia Vietnam Business Council

Corporations

ABB Australia
Accenture
AFG Venture Group
Allens Arthur Robinson
ANZ
Bluescope Steel
BOC Ltd
BP Australia Pty Ltd
Cisco Australia and New Zealand
Clayton Utz
Commonwealth Bank Australia

Corrs Chambers Westgarth
DP World Australia Pty Ltd
DuPont Australia Ltd
Energy Australia
Ernst & Young
Fortescue Metals Group
Freehills
GE Australia & New Zealand
Hay Group
Hospira
Insurance Australia Group
IBM Australia & New Zealand
JP Morgan Australia & New Zealand
KPMG
Macquarie Group
Mallesons Stephen Jaques
Minter Ellison
Mitchell Communication Group
Nufarm Limited
OneSteel
PricewaterhouseCoopers
Qantas Airways Limited
ResMed Ltd
Santos Limited
Singapore Airlines
Sino Gold
Sydney Mining Club
Thales Australia
Toll Group
United Group Limited
Victoria Investments & Properties
Wesfarmers Limited
Westpac