

CHAMPIONING OUR TALENT

**SUPPORTING ASIA-ENGAGED YOUTH,
GROWING ASIA INTEREST**

A new research collaboration mapping
the challenges and opportunities for
Asia-engaged young Australians

RECOMMENDATIONS

These have been formulated throughout this research project, across all three reports, with a focus on innovation.

Monitoring trends

- **Recommendation 1:** Expand the Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Indicators, as explored in *Keeping Connected*, to develop and implement an annual Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Index.
- **Recommendation 2:** Identify data sources and collect participation data regarding Australia-Asia Pacific youth volunteering, at least on an annual basis, in partnership with stakeholders such as education institutions, not-for-profit organisations and government bodies.
- **Recommendation 3:** Research the views of Australian employers, and specifically their human resources teams, to better understand workplace demand in Australia for Asia literacy, particularly for graduate, entry-level and early career positions.

Policy advocacy

- **Recommendation 4:** Advocate for a broader definition of Asia literacy which encompasses the diversity of young people in Australia as well as Asia-related experiential learning programs, youth dialogues, internships, volunteering opportunities, paid work, digital exposure and other informal experiences.
- **Recommendation 5:** Advocate for multi-year, multilateral funding sources to support the work of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations, to foster collaboration between these organisations and to seed other youth-focused initiatives.
- **Recommendation 6:** Advocate for comprehensive employer education to be included in the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan to build greater awareness of this initiative within Australia's business community.
- **Recommendation 7:** Advocate for immigration settings which facilitate international students from across Asia and the Pacific to stay and settle in Australia post-graduation, in line with published skills shortages, and to access meaningful work and career opportunities.

Program innovation

- **Recommendation 8:** Create an Asia literacy credential or 'badge' to be used by the following groups:
 - Young people who live, study and work in Australia as they navigate their early careers.
 - Australian-based employers who value Asia literacy within their staff; seek Asia literacy in their talent attraction programs and for entry-level and early career positions; and offer professional development opportunities to build, develop and deepen Asia literacy.
- **Recommendation 9:** Develop programs which support life-long Asia-related learning opportunities beyond formal education, post-graduation and targeted at the early career stage of young people in Australia.
- **Recommendation 10:** Pilot a 'reverse mentoring' program through which Asia-literate young people can influence middle and senior management levels in Australian organisations.

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CHAMPIONING OUR TALENT

INTRODUCTION

This report explores the ways in which the Asia-related diversity and talent of young people who live, study and work in Australia can be celebrated and championed. We test the key findings of our research with Australia-Asia youth leaders and present recommendations that span our research partnership.

Australia's future prosperity and security is linked to the region in which we are located. A shared regional geography, however, is the means to further an end and not an end in itself. The future of Australia-Asia engagement will be shaped by people, particularly young people. As a global champion of migration, tourism, international education and professional mobility, in post-COVID-19 contexts, Australia must rebuild its reputation as a welcoming, open country that is energised and empowered by a flow of students and scholars, migrants, tourists and professionals from across Asia¹. Above all, we must recognise the role of youth in driving the future of people-to-people relationships across the region.

This is the final report in a three-part series commissioned by Asia Society Australia to map the challenges and opportunities for Asia-engaged young Australians in COVID-19 contexts. The first report, *Keeping Connected*, explores the impact of COVID-19 on Australia-Asia youth engagement and presents evidence-based assessments of connectivity trends. Our second report, *Asia Literacy and Employability*, reframes the concept of Asia literacy by providing unique, data-informed insights into the diversity of young Australians and the Asia-related skills, knowledge and experience of young people who live, study and work in Australia.

This report firstly summarises the evidence base generated by our research partnership and presents the key findings of interviews with Australia-Asia youth leaders. A set of recommendations, which span the research partnership, are then discussed. These recommendations are innovative, creative and align to shared global experiences of COVID-19 as well as specific regional tensions.

DEFINITIONS >

There are three key terms used in this report which are important to define from the outset:

Youth

refers here to young people aged between 18 and 35 years.

Asia

is intentionally used as an umbrella term to cover the following regions, nations and economies:

- **Southeast Asia:** Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.
- **Northeast Asia:** People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Mongolia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea and Taiwan.
- **South Asia:** Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- In this report, **Pacific** uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics classifications of [Melanesia](#), [Micronesia](#) and [Polynesia](#), and excludes New Zealand.

Asian languages

refers in this report to 'Eastern Asian languages', 'Southern Asian languages' and 'Southeast Asian' languages. For further details, refer to Appendix A in [Asia Literacy and Employability](#).

¹ See P Ivanov, '[Election policy brief: Australia's future in a shared region](#)', Asia Society Australia, 16 May 2022.



/ It's important to have an ecosystem
to build the Asia literacy and
capability of our young people. /

Jenny Tran
Australia-Vietnam Leadership Dialogue



/ Throughout the pandemic we've seen the immense value that
international students bring to Australia... The additional
cultural and linguistic diversity and the different ideas that
international students from across Asia can bring to Australian
workplaces has the potential to transform these organisations. /

Oscar Ong
Council of International Students Australia

OUR EVIDENCE BASE

REPORT 1: KEEPING CONNECTED >

The first report in this series, *Keeping Connected*, explores the impact of COVID-19 on young Australians' engagement with youth from across Asia. Through the inclusion of case studies and a separate 'directory', this report highlights a selection of varied and creative solutions to sustaining Australia-Asia youth engagement, many of which were generated by youth-led organisations throughout the pandemic and amidst geopolitical tensions and ongoing travel restrictions.

This report is unique in that it presents an evidence-based assessment of trends regarding Australia-Asia youth engagement. The Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Indicators, which were included in *Keeping Connected*, are a framework for measuring and monitoring changes to engagement between young people from Australia and the Asia Pacific across three key channels: tourism, international education and employment.

The 2021 Indicators clearly illustrate the profound impact of COVID-19 on Australia-Asia Pacific youth engagement, particularly for tourism and employment. They also show that international education remained a primary mechanism for engagement between Australians and youth from across the Asia Pacific during the pandemic. This was fuelled by international students from across the Asia Pacific who remained in Australia for their studies during COVID-19; who engaged in Australian transnational education programs from outside of Australia; or who commenced or continued their studies remotely. Furthermore, demand by Australian university students for learning abroad destinations in the Asia Pacific remained relatively strong throughout 2020 and 2021 and will drive the re-mobilisation of Australian students to the region in future years. Innovative Asia-Pacific 'virtual mobility' was also introduced and expanded throughout COVID-19 and, because these programs lower access barriers to learning abroad, is likely to be continued into the future.

The charts on the adjacent page capture the uniqueness of the data presented in *Keeping Connected*. For the first time, we published data that captures the purpose of travel for incoming short-term visitors into Australia aged 18 to 35 years from countries across the Asia Pacific. This highlights the significance of the Asia Pacific youth market to Australian tourism, international education and employment-related travel, and allows standardised comparisons to be made across these three engagement channels.

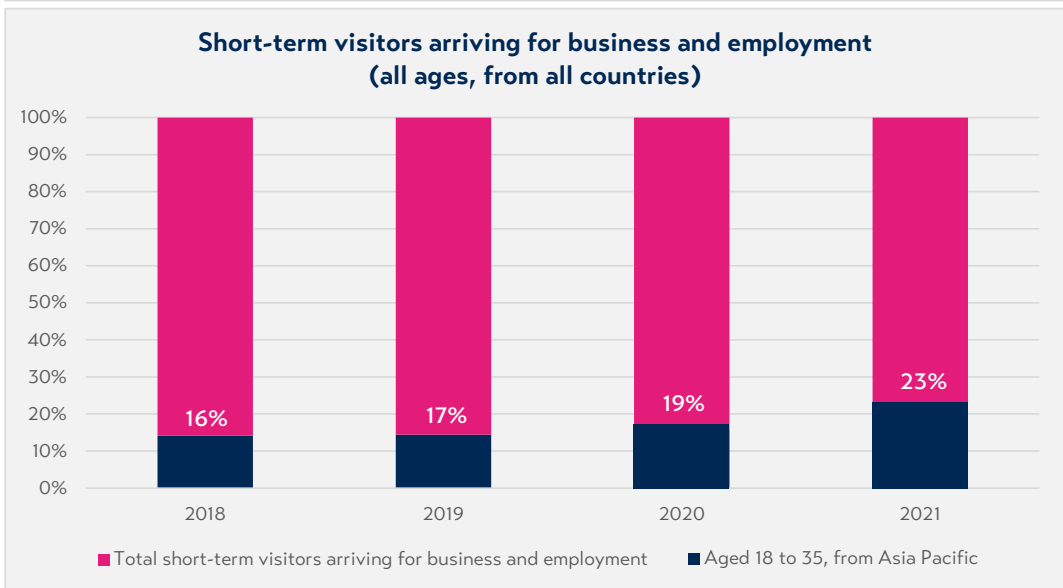
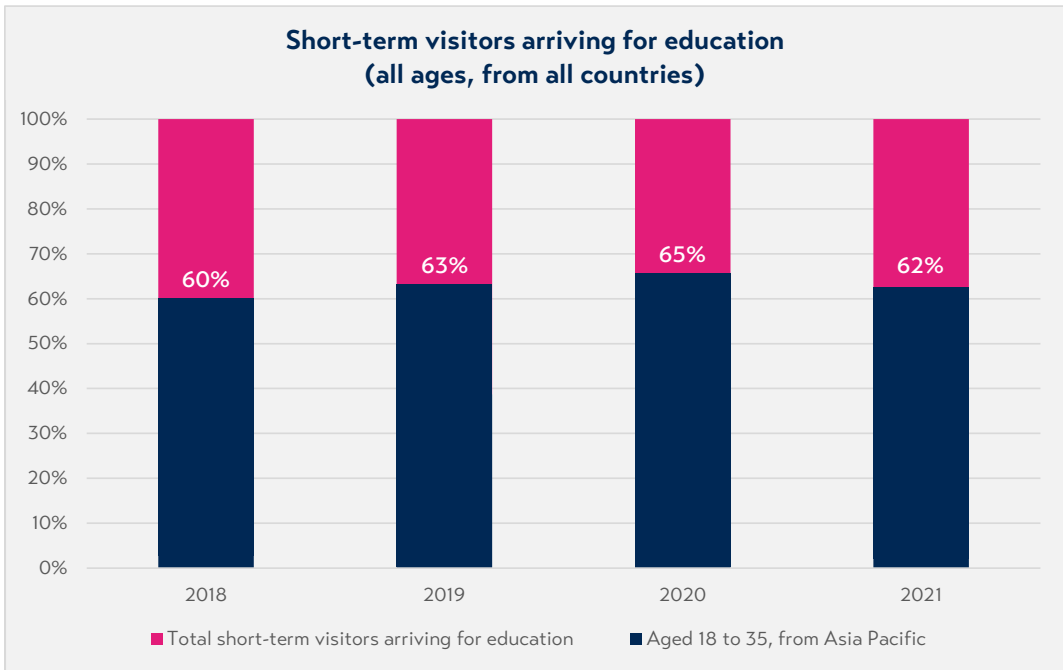
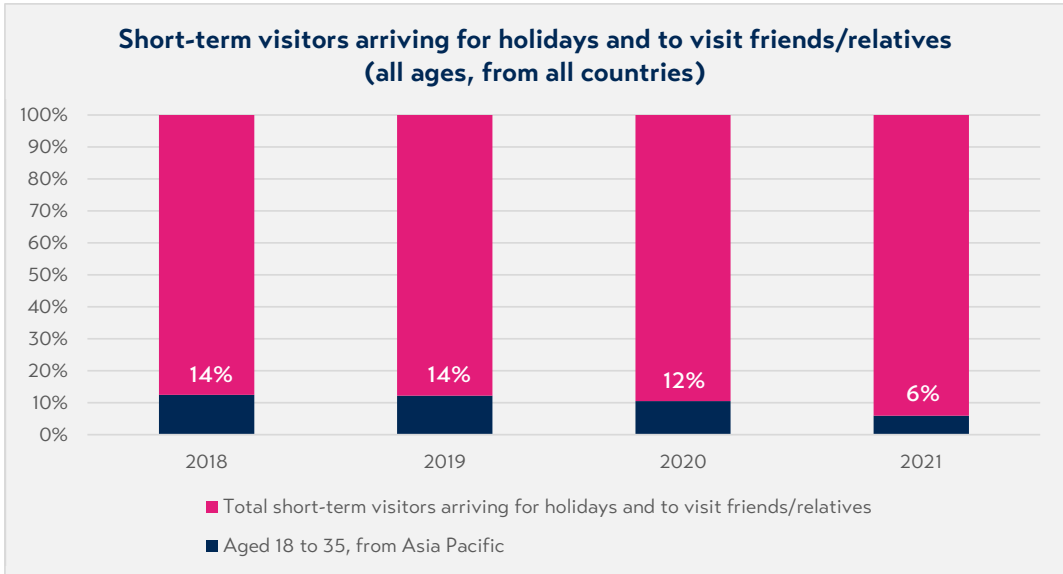
Prior to COVID-19, young people aged 18 to 35 from across the Asia Pacific comprised 14% of all visitors to Australia for 'holiday' and 'visiting friends/relatives purposes'; 63% for education purposes²; and 17% for 'business' and 'employment' purposes. Importantly, this also provides an evidence base from which to track post-COVID-19 recovery and other future trends.

Keeping Connected also demonstrates that civic engagement drove Australia-Asia Pacific youth connectivity during COVID-19 alongside international education. A number of leaders of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations were interviewed for this report and the initiatives their organisations delivered throughout the pandemic are mapped in a separate *directory*. Overall, *Keeping Connected* shows that despite causing deep-seated disruption to connectivity between young people from Australia and across the Asia Pacific, COVID-19 also seeded youth-led innovation in bilateral and multilateral engagement. Young people demonstrated their resilience and willingness to experiment with new modes of engagement. For many, future engagement is hybridised and focuses on human capital. For all, there is a need to embrace innovation and change in Australia-Asia youth engagement in 2022 and beyond.

Travel isn't the be-all and end-all of engagement.

Deborah Zhang
Australia-China Youth Association

² As noted in *Generation Asia Report 1: Keeping Connected*, Asia Society Australia, 2022, p. 9, this figure would be even greater if students aged under 18 were included in the data set.



Source: Based on ABS data, Overseas Arrivals and Departures (ABS Cat. 3401.0), 2021

REPORT 2: ASIA LITERACY AND EMPLOYABILITY >

Our second report, [Asia Literacy and Employability](#), reframes the concept of Asia literacy by providing unique, data-informed insights into the diversity of young Australians; their Asia-related skills, knowledge and experience; and the potential of young people from across the Asia Pacific who are living, studying and working in Australia. This broadens perspectives of what Asia literacy is, the ways in which it can be measured and how it links to employability.

Broader approaches to Asia literacy include the following, often inter-related, ways that Australian youth gain Asia-related skills, knowledge and experience:

- Family background and heritage.
- Experiential learning in Asia, such as participation in an outbound student mobility program, a virtual mobility experience, a formal youth dialogue or an extended holiday in the region.
- Participation in an internship or volunteer program or undertaking paid work in Asia.
- Engagement in social media and digital platforms, including gaming and streaming services.
- Teaching or learning in community language programs and related settings.
- Other networks, friendships and personal connections through which young people learn about and experience Asia, including participating in Australia-Asia youth-led organisations.

As an example, [Asia Literacy and Employability](#) presents data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics regarding young Australians and their use of Asian languages 'at home' as reported in the last four Australian Censuses, including 2021. This data shows that the number of people in Australia using languages other than English at home is increasing. This includes the usage of Asian languages by Australian citizens aged 18 to 35 years, which is the age group of interest to this research.

According to the 2021 Census, 8.9% of young Australians use Eastern, Southern and Southeast Asian languages at home. This equates to more than 410,000 people, which is greater than the combined population of Hobart and Darwin. The number of young Australians who use an Asian language at home is also growing, as a proportion of the total population. This increased from 5.2% of all Australians aged 18 to 35 in 2006 to 8.9% in 2021. In New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory at least 1 in 10 young Australians use an Asian language at home.

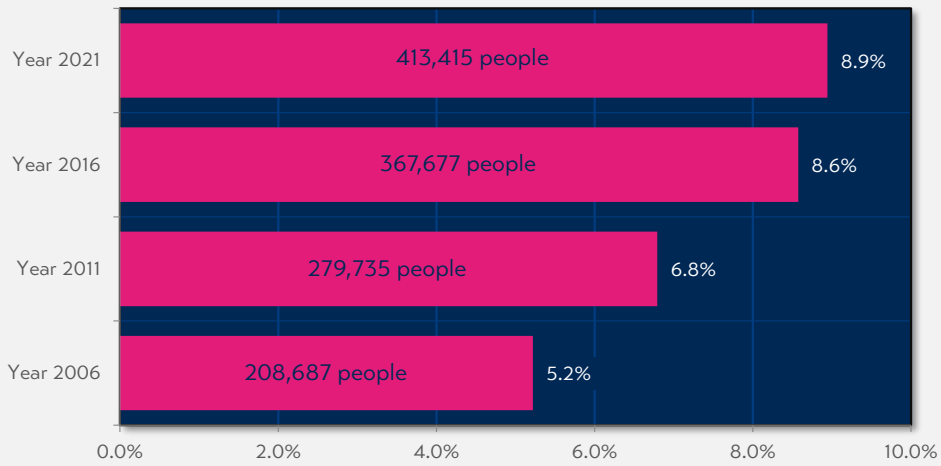
Eastern, Southern and Southeast Asian languages are represented in the top 5 Asian languages used by young Australians at home in 2021. Nationally, the most used Asian language was Mandarin (66,028 people) followed by Vietnamese (62,759), Cantonese (50,903), Punjabi (30,823) and Hindi (23,910). Tagalog and Filipino, when combined, accounted for nearly 31,000 language users which would place them fourth.

This data highlights a human capital asset within Australia, which contrasts to the conventional deficit framework through which Asia literacy is usually expressed³. In taking a broader perspective of Asia literacy, the diversity of young Australians emerges along with their diverse Asia-related lived experiences and aspirations. We must increase efforts to not only understand this diversity but also to find ways to develop, share and champion this asset.

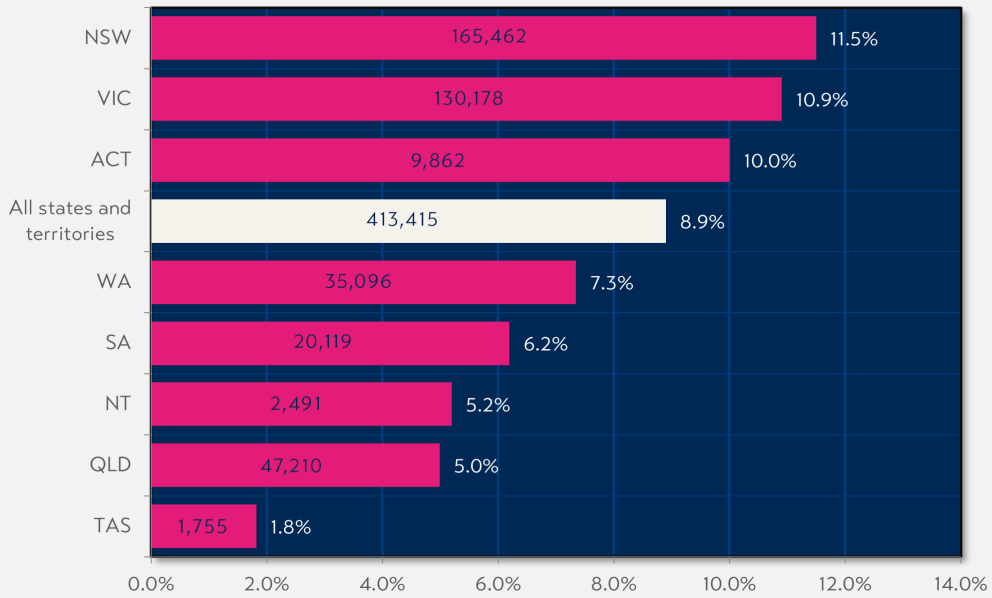
In linking Asia literacy to employability within Australia, there is a clear need to understand Asia literacy as it is viewed by Australian employers across business, government and the non-profit sector. Currently it is difficult to identify Australian employers who specifically seek Asia literacy through their graduate recruitment programs and other schemes to attract entry-level and early career professionals. Further research is required to explore the ways in which Asia literacy is valued by Australian employers, including whether human resources professionals in Australia are indeed equipped to recognise the diversity of Australian youth and their Asia literacy.

3 For example, see the articles listed by the Asian Studies Association of Australia in [Languages study crisis – A national conversation](#)

Proportion of Australian citizens, aged 18 to 35, using Asian languages at home, 2006 - 2021



Proportion of Australian citizens, aged 18 to 35, using Asian languages at home by state and territory, 2021



Source: Based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data

YOUTH VOICES

In acknowledgement of UN International Youth Day, on 11 August 2022 Asia Society Australia hosted 120 young people in-person in Victoria, and hundreds more online, for the third national [Generation Asia Young Leaders Forum](#) supported by the Victorian Government. The theme for the 2022 Forum directly aligned with this research partnership: ‘Reframing Asia Literacy, Building Asia Careers’.

Delegates, including those who participated in-person and digitally, raised the following issues:

- Many young people in Australia do not feel empowered by Australian-based employers to develop and utilise their Asia literacy to its full potential. This contributes to the uncertainty that many young people who live, study and work in Australia have about how to leverage their Asia capabilities for an Asia-engaged career. There is also a need for Australian employers to view ‘capability over seniority’ in relation to Asia-literate young people when making hiring decisions and offering professional development opportunities.
- Young people who live, study and work in Australia view intercultural skills as important for their future careers in and with Asia and as more important than ‘lived experienced in Asia’.
- Australian employers do not fully recognise international students from across the Asia Pacific, who live, study and work in Australia, as a key source of human capital who can better connect their organisation to the region.

- Personal relationships are an important outcome of Australia-Asia youth connectivity and can lead to a diverse range of opportunities as young people move through their careers. These relationships should not be underestimated.
- In addition to recognising and championing existing talent, there is a need to grow the number of young people in Australia who are Asia-literate and Asia-interested, particularly amid current global tensions.

To further explore these themes, in addition to the key findings of [Keeping Connected](#) and [Asia Literacy and Employability](#), in-depth interviews were held with leaders of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations, including formal youth dialogues, student groups and groups of young professionals. Many of these organisations were also interviewed as part of [Keeping Connected](#) and include:

- [ASEAN-Australia Strategic Youth Partnership](#)
- [Asia Society Australia’s Generation A Young Leaders Network](#)
- [Australia-China Youth Association](#)
- [Australia-China Youth Dialogue](#)
- [Australia India Youth Dialogue](#)
- [Australia-Indonesia Youth Association](#)
- [Australia-Japan Youth Dialogue](#)
- [Australia Korea Youth Professionals Association](#)
- [Australia-Vietnam Leadership Dialogue](#)
- [Council of International Students Australia](#)
- [International Education Association of Australia Young Professionals](#)
- [Young Australians in International Affairs](#)



REACTIONS >

Two words dominated the responses from Australia-Asia youth leaders when asked about their reactions to *Keeping Connected* and *Asia Literacy and Employability*: 'resonance' and 'validation'. Many felt reassured that their lived experiences had been reflected in the research, particularly in relation to Australian Census data regarding Asian language usage by young Australians in *Asia Literacy and Employability*. Seeing their experiences included in formal research has been valuable and confidence-building for these youth leaders and they are overwhelmingly positive about the research.

A number of youth leaders also commented that there had already been opportunities for them to use the data within these reports in their professional roles as well as in their voluntary work for Australia-Asia youth-led organisations. Their responses demonstrate the importance of engaging with these ideas and reshaping narratives regarding Australia-Asia engagement and Asia literacy in Australia.

/ I come from an Asian background.... my family speaks an Asian language as well, but growing up I never understood the value in that. For a lot of my friends who come from a similar background, we never used to think of it as an asset... it was almost a liability. The data suggests that attitude is changing. /

Liam Tay Kearney
Australia-China Youth Dialogue

/ It's very validating to see our lived experiences reflected in these reports. /

Jenny Tran
*Australia-Vietnam
Leadership Dialogue*



/ The reports really resonated with me. I felt seen. I have friends who have a similar background to me and it was validating to see us recognised in this way. /

Iori Forsyth
*International Education Association of Australia,
NSW Young Professionals*

ON EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYMENT >

Many Australia-Asia youth leaders feel that their own Asia-related skills and experience as well as those of their members and alumni are largely not recognised or valued by Australian employers. There is a general feeling that young people invest in themselves in relation to their Asia literacy by self-funding their education as well as their participation in Asia-related mobility programs, youth dialogues and other initiatives. A number of interviewees, especially those working in the private sector, felt that this investment is under-recognised and under-reciprocated by Australian employers. There are, however, notable exceptions including government employers such as Austrade and state and territory-based trade and investment agencies and other employers already active in Asia.

This aligns with the research gap identified in [Asia Literacy and Employability](#) and points to a major disconnect within Australian organisations, many of which are led by senior executives who openly support Asia literacy through their participation in forums such as Asia Society Australia, bilateral and multilateral business chambers and other business engagement initiatives such as through the [New Colombo Plan](#). Our interviewees noted that this level of support, however, is not consistently and comprehensively reflected in the human resources practices of these organisations. This is particularly apparent in talent attraction programs and in the recruitment, retention and professional development of young people in entry-level and early career positions.

A number of interviewees identified the opportunity cost of this disconnect. What are employers 'missing out on' if they choose not to tap into the existing and expansive diversity of Asia-related talent of young people who live and work in Australia, or if they are not even aware that this talent exists?

Youth-led organisations also focus on this issue. For example, the Australia-China Youth Dialogue (ACYD), established in 2010, has generated an alumni pool who are now mid-career professionals, many of whom are responsible for hiring decisions within their workplaces. Alumni are now 'paying it forward' to the next generation by recognising and recruiting young, China-literate talent. It should also be noted that in the current climate of bilateral political tension, ACYD are a top 'track 2' dialogue between Australia and China. The potential of this position is extraordinary and demonstrates both the power and potential of youth engagement, particularly at a time when geopolitical tensions between Australia and China are at a climax and dialogue between senior leaders is limited.

PRACTICAL STEPS >

Australia-Asia youth-led organisations actively seek and promote opportunities to champion the skills, knowledge and experience of their members and alumni. These organisations also create programs and launch initiatives to fill perceived 'gaps' related to this; for a number of these organisations, this is closely related to their founding purpose and mission. Youth leaders also see value in networking and 'community building' activities, which form strong connections between their members and alumni, enabling individuals to support each other, as in the Australia-China Youth Dialogue example above.

A number of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations administer or promote a range of internship and mentoring programs; hackathons; as well as career resources and 'jobs boards' that include Asia-focused roles appropriate to their members and alumni. For example, Young Australians in International Affairs maintains an online [jobs board](#), which includes roles with an international scope as well as Asia-focused roles, and a [careers blog](#). The Australia-Japan Youth Dialogue seeks sponsorship from Japan-focused employers and commented that this process in itself provides them with valuable opportunities to talk directly to employers. The Australia Korea Young Professionals Association holds industry-focused events for their members featuring expert speakers and the Council of International Students Australia works with state and territory-based Study Clusters, such as [Study Melbourne](#), on employability initiatives for international students in Australia.

Youth leaders commented on the need to assist their members and alumni in 'packaging' and presenting their Asia-related skills, knowledge and experience to Australian employers. For example, Australian SMEs often have limited knowledge of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations and their programs as well as Asia-related government initiatives such as the New Colombo Program. In addition to strategies that assist Asia-engaged young people to better present themselves to current and prospective employers, Australia-Asia youth leaders agree that more work is required to ensure Australian employers and their human resources teams are equipped to recognise Asia-related skills, knowledge and experience in their existing and future workforce.

Australia-Asia youth leaders also commented on the need to continue building their Asia-related skills, knowledge and experience throughout their early careers. They value opportunities to work in the region via secondments, internships and other opportunities. They suggest that structural issues need to be addressed and that regional mobility is embedded into organisational workflows to improve accessibility and

to incentivise early career professionals. In this way, Asia literacy can be viewed on par with digital literacy and the need to develop and sustain other types of emerging skills.

Asia literacy is a skill that requires maintenance.

Iori Forsyth

International Education Association of Australia, NSW Young Professionals

Alongside the case studies of existing professional development and recognition programs listed in this report, Australia-Asia youth leaders made the following suggestions for new initiatives:

- Deliver awareness-building activities such as an 'Asia literacy month' which can act as an umbrella for multiple activities.
- Establish a jobs board for roles of interest to Asia capable young people. Whilst many organisations do this for a particular focus country or group of countries, or for a focus sector, such as [Young Australians in International Affairs](#) and the [International Education Association of Australia](#), there is no Australian resource that focuses on graduate, entry-level and other early career roles across the region and including multiple sectors and industries.
- Establish a grants scheme to support the work of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations that is funded by business and is differentiated from existing grants schemes, such as the Australian government's [International Relations Grants Program](#), which are primarily not multilateral. Youth leaders also cited examples of their need for funding or pro bono expertise to assist them with specific issues that their organisations have experienced related to compliance and regulation.
- Promote the concept of diversity-based 'reverse mentoring' which pairs people who might not otherwise come together and inverts typical mentoring power relationships. Reverse mentoring can be profoundly transformational for both mentor and mentee and can promote a culture of inclusion in organisations⁴.

- Conduct further research into the 'opportunity cost' of not engaging with Asia and defining this as a risk. This could involve the development of a business case for hiring Asia-literate young people.
- Educate Australian-based employers and their human resources teams about the value of Asia literacy; the diversity of Asia literacy across young people who live, study and work in Australia; as well as various Asia-focused initiatives, particularly those that have been scaled, such as the New Colombo Plan. This will also aid understanding of any barriers or apprehension these employers and human resources professionals have in relation to hiring Asia-literate young people, including international students and graduates.
- Ensure there are opportunities to continue to build Asia literacy, at scale, for Asia-engaged young people who are already in the workforce as well as for young people who may not have had opportunities to engage with Asia throughout their formal education. For example, through a postgraduate version of the New Colombo Plan or an expansion of existing scholarships such as the Victoria Government's [Hamer Scholarships](#).

I think we must create a diversity of two-way mobility options, not just in higher education but also in early career and graduate programs. This needs to include clearer migration and employment pathways for young people and the creation of formal infrastructure such as funding and visas to support those pathways into both countries.

Bodean Hedwards

Australia India Youth Dialogue

⁴ For example, see G Atuahene Junior and S Harrison, [Reverse mentoring: Seeing things differently](#), UK Civil Service Blog, 2019.

Case Study | Leadership Programs

Established over 25 years ago, the [Asialink Leaders Program](#) is a pioneering initiative focused on developing future Asia-capable leaders in Australia. The program now has over 1,000 alumni globally. Although not explicitly for young people, this program is one of a handful of executive education programs in Australia that focuses on building and developing Asia literacy.

The Asialink Leaders Program is delivered across seven months through a series of immersions, expert-led sessions, dialogues and coaching. It also includes an Asia-focused workplace project to apply learning in the context of participants' work environments. An annual Canberra Summit is also held to explore Asia engagement through the lens of Australia's federal government and to understand the context for Australia's current and future strategic policies across foreign affairs, trade, industry and innovation. Entry to the program is based on merit and includes a written application and interview.

The [Australia Japan Business Co-operation Committee](#) (AJBCC) has established a '[Future Leaders Program](#)' to support the development of the next generation of Australia-Japan business leaders. The stated objective of the program is to assist prospective leaders within AJBCC member organisations who are aged under 40 to develop skills for the Asian Century. Initially established in 2014 as roundtable event within the Australia-Japan Joint Business Conference, AJBCC's Future Leaders Program has grown to include participation in industry conferences; professional networking events; a mentorship program; and deep-dive seminars and study sessions focused on challenges and opportunities within the bilateral relationship.

A key feature of this program is the mentorship component, which is a year-long initiative that pairs a participant of the Future Leaders Program with a senior business leader from a different, yet like-minded organisation. Mentoring provides structured connection to a potential role model and helps mentees make connections with senior figures outside of their own organisations. It is also described by participants as providing an all-important 'human element' in enhancing Japan literacy.

Case Study | Recognition Programs

The '[40 under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australian Awards](#)' are an initiative of the [Asian-Australian Leadership Summit](#). Now in their fourth year, the Awards seek to reshape and confront Australia's 'bamboo ceiling', that is, the underrepresentation of Asian-Australians in leadership positions. Nominees must be aged under 40, be Australian citizens or permanent residents and can live and work in Australia or abroad.

Jieh-Yung Lo, Director of [ANU's Centre for Asian-Australian Leadership](#) and co-convenor of these awards, says that Asian-Australians account for about 13% of Australia's population but hold less than 4% of senior leadership positions. He describes this as 'chronic under-representation that will have an adverse impact on Australia's future success'. Martine Letts, CEO of [Asialink Group](#) and part of the judging panel for these awards comments that there has been 'a lack of focus by senior leaders on leveraging Asian-Australian talent. At a time when everybody is complaining about the lack of talent, the Awards put Asian-Australians under the limelight...'

Through this program, awards are made in categories including Arts & Culture, Community & Advocacy, Corporate, Education, Entrepreneurship, Legal & Professions, Media, Public Sector, Science & Medicine and Sport, with an 'Overall Winner' and an 'Under 25 Rising Star' also awarded. The 2022 overall winner is [Nguyen-Tu Le](#), a Vietnamese-Australian community worker, solicitor, advocate and organiser.

In 2021, Asia Society Australia launched the [Melbourne Asia Game Changer](#) initiative to showcase under-recognised and inspirational individuals who are contributing to Australia-Asia engagement. These awards also aim to showcase Melbourne and Victoria as Australia's cultural and intellectual gateway to Asia.

Whilst not specifically focused on young people, these awards bring greater acknowledgement to Australians, especially Asian-Australians, who are making a positive impact across the region in fields such as the arts, health, science, sport, business and media. The program draws on Asia Society's global [Asia Game Changer Awards](#), which were launched in 2014 to identify and honour leaders who are making positive contributions to the future of Asia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations have been collected throughout this research partnership, across all three reports. In collating these, we have focused on recommendations which are innovative and which encourage a broader perspective of Asia literacy.

MONITORING TRENDS >

A unique aspect of these three reports is the evidence base they provide about Australia-Asia youth connectivity and the Asia literacy of young people who live, study and work in Australia. More work is required to ensure there is a robust evidence base going forward to capture current and future trends.

These reports in themselves have been great in showcasing the reality of the situation and highlighting core issues. Without understanding what the problem is, we can't solve it.

Ben Edmunds

Australia-China Youth Association

Recommendation 1:

Expand the Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Indicators, as explored in [Keeping Connected](#), to develop and implement an annual Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Index.

Rationale: The Australia-Asia Pacific Youth Engagement Indicators provide an evidence-based framework for measuring and monitoring changes to engagement between young people from Australia and the Asia Pacific across three key channels: tourism, international education and employment. An Index would synthesise these Indicators into a collective measurement of youth engagement between Australia and the Asia Pacific. An annual Index not only allows for regular monitoring of Australia-Asia Pacific youth engagement but also enables other groups and audiences to use the Index as a benchmark or 'health check' of their own engagement levels.

Recommendation 2:

Identify data sources and collect participation data regarding Australia-Asia Pacific youth volunteering, at least on an annual basis, in partnership with stakeholders such as education institutions, not-for-profit organisations and government bodies.

Rationale: Australia-Asia youth volunteerism is a crucial component of civic engagement for which comprehensive, consistent and reliable participation data is not readily available. It is important to note that all youth stakeholders interviewed in this series of reports lead and contribute to Australia-Asia youth organisation as *volunteers*. Volunteering occurs via formal and informal arrangements and intersects tourism, international education and employment, which complicates its measurement. Data should encompass bilateral and multilateral formal volunteering programs and other informal volunteering opportunities.

Recommendation 3:

Research the views of Australian employers, and specifically their human resources teams, to better understand workplace demand in Australia for Asia literacy, particularly for graduate, entry-level and early career positions.

Rationale: We must understand Asia literacy as it is viewed by Australian employers across business, government and the not-for-profit sector and particularly within human resources teams. [Asia Literacy and Employability](#) highlights the paucity of research which focuses on the views of human resources teams (and not senior leaders or executives) and the requirements of graduate, entry-level and early career positions (and not leadership or executive roles). Research should focus on partnering with Australian employers to produce practical tools that would help human resources teams to identify the Asia capability requirements of specific roles and how these skills, knowledge and experience can be sought and developed through talent attraction and professional development processes.

POLICY ADVOCACY >

Across these three reports, a number of policy recommendations have emerged for employers, industry groups and government. These include:

Recommendation 4:

Advocate for a broader definition of Asia literacy which encompasses the diversity of young people in Australia as well as Asia-related experiential learning programs, youth dialogues, internships, volunteering opportunities, paid work, digital exposure and other informal experiences.

Rationale: The need to reframe and broaden our perspectives of 'Asia literacy' was detailed in [Asia Literacy and Employability](#) and is central to many of the recommendations included in this report. By reframing Asia literacy, the diversity of young people who live, study and work in Australia emerges along with their diverse lived experiences and aspirations related to Asia. This will drive innovative approaches to trend analysis, policy advocacy and program delivery, as outlined in these recommendations, to generate a 'step change' in how Asia literacy is developed, shared and championed in Australia.

Recommendation 5:

Advocate for multi-year, multilateral funding sources to support the work of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations, to foster collaboration between these organisations and to seed other youth-focused initiatives.

Rationale: Many Australia-Asia youth-led organisations apply for funding through the Australian government's [International Relations Grants Program](#). These grants are primarily made on a bilateral basis in relation to Asia, with the exception of ASEAN, and currently do not provide funding opportunities for projects based in the Pacific. There is a need to advocate for multi-year, multilateral funding that includes a focus on youth-led initiatives. This will support the operations of Australia-Asia youth-led organisations, providing them with greater certainty, sustainability and potential impact in continuing their important work that has been documented in this research as well as to seed new youth-focused initiatives.

Recommendation 6:

Advocate for comprehensive employer education to be included in the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan to build greater awareness of this initiative within Australia's business community.

Rationale: The impact of the New Colombo Plan on Australian students' participation in university-based outbound learning abroad experiences to the Asia Pacific was documented in [Asia Literacy and Employability](#). Interviewees for this current report commented that many Australian employers seem unfamiliar with the New Colombo Plan and the positive outcomes experienced by participants in relation to their Asia literacy. Whilst the New Colombo Plan currently has a [business champions](#) group, as outlined in Recommendation 3, further research is required to understand workplace demand for Asia literacy, particularly within human resources teams, as well as the value they place on initiatives such as the New Colombo Plan in recruitment processes.

Recommendation 7:

Advocate for immigration settings which facilitate international students from across Asia and the Pacific to stay and settle in Australia post-graduation, in line with published skills shortages, and to access meaningful work and career opportunities.

Rationale: International students from across the Asia Pacific, who live, study and work in Australia during their studies and post-graduation are a key, yet under-recognised, source of human capital who can better connect Australian employers to the region. Whilst changes are currently slated for Australia's post-study work rights visa program that will benefit many international students and graduates as well as Australian employers, more work needs to be done to change Australian employers' perceptions of international students. Additional advocacy is also required to ensure Australia remains a desirable option for this significant and high-calibre talent pool and that they are able to access pathways to permanent residency and citizenship.

PROGRAM INNOVATION >

Throughout *Keeping Connected*, *Asia Literacy and Employability* and this current report a number of suggestions related to program innovation have been raised by interviewees, the Research Team and the partnership's Advisory Group. They include:

Recommendation 8:

Create an Asia literacy credential or 'badge' to be used by the following groups:

- *Young people who live, study and work in Australia as they navigate graduate recruitment and their early careers.*
- *Australian-based employers who value Asia literacy within their staff; seek Asia literacy in graduate recruitment programs and for entry-level and early career positions; and offer professional development opportunities to build and develop Asia literacy.*

Rationale: Our research demonstrates that many young people who live, study and work in Australia feel that their Asia-related skills, knowledge and experience are not understood by current and prospective employers. An independent Asia literacy credential or badge will assist to overcome this by providing a structured approach to 'packaging' a young person's Asia literacy as well as providing a mechanism for employers who value Asia literacy to communicate this to prospective employees. This will also require an employer-focused education component.

Recommendation 9:

Develop programs which support life-long Asia-related learning opportunities beyond formal education, post-graduation and targeted at the early career stage of young people in Australia.

Rationale: There is a paucity of Asia-literacy programs in Australia that are delivered to young people outside of formal education and during their early careers. Those programs which do exist tend to be niche; have high barriers to access, including cost; and are focused on developing existing Asia literacy and not working from a 'beginner' level. It is in this space where Australia-Asia youth-led organisations have been most active and effective, but these groups require additional resources and funding to continue, let alone expand, their presence and impact.

Recommendation 10:

Pilot a 'reverse mentoring' program through which Asia-literate young people can influence middle and senior management levels in Australian organisations.

Rationale: Many of the interviewees for this report spoke about the value of mentoring programs or highlighted gaps in this area. 'Reverse mentoring' empowers young people by inverting the conventional structure of mentoring programs in which a senior person typically mentors a junior person. Reverse mentoring addresses the structural issue at the heart of this research: those who are highly Asia-engaged and best equipped to champion Asia literacy are often young people who likely do not hold positions of power or leadership.

The choices we make, or fail to make, today will determine whether we break down or break through in response to the challenges young people are experiencing.

Jayathma Wickramanayake
United National Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth

NEXT STEPS

This research partnership, and the three reports it has produced, focuses on youth and their lived experiences as a driver for change in Australia-Asia engagement. Australia-Asia youth-led organisations have pioneered this change and we acknowledge their remarkable work, in particular, their resilience, willingness and innovation in trialling new modes of engagement throughout and beyond COVID-19.

The recommendations presented in this report focus on monitoring trends; advocating to employers, industry groups and government for policy change; and developing and delivering innovative programs. Our recommendations also highlight a number of opportunities for greater employer engagement in Australia-Asia youth connectivity. This has emerged as a critical point from our conversations with Australia-Asia youth leaders.

Through this research partnership, Asia Society Australia and the International Education Association of Australia set out to capture a unique moment in time when the risk of regional disengagement by young people due to the effects of COVID-19

intersected with increasingly complex and fraught regional geopolitical relationships. Our research partnership has outlined these realities by providing an important space to convene and amplify Australia-Asia youth voices. We have also presented unique, data-informed insights to document a traditionally underserved demographic, that is, young people aged 18 to 35 years. The three reports generated through our research partnership are an important public resource that should be used to inform and enhance others' work, including that of government, industry and the not-for-profit sector as well as the ongoing endeavours of Asia-engaged young individuals and Australia-Asia youth-led organisations.

Our research can be extended and expanded through the activation of the ten recommendations listed in this report. Their implementation requires Australian governments, businesses, education institutions and not-for-profit organisations to work together to empower Asia-engaged young people who live, study and work in Australia and to grow Asia-interest in future generations.

One of the key conversations that we've been having with our stakeholders is that bilateral relations will be mobilised by young people. We need the understanding and perspectives of young people. They need to be at the table.

Bodean Hedwards
Australia India Youth Dialogue



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Advisory Group

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ASIA SOCIETY AUSTRALIA

Asia Society Australia is a business and policy think-tank and membership organisation dedicated to Asia. We are a national, independent, non-partisan, and non-political institution with a national centre in Melbourne, an office in Sydney, and programs accessible in Australia and globally through digital and face-to-face platforms. Asia Society Australia is a centre of Asia Society – a preeminent global non-profit organisation dedicated to Asia, founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, with centres in New York, Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, Paris, San Francisco, Seoul, Sydney, Tokyo, Washington, DC and Zurich.

GENERATION ASIA

Asia Society Australia's Generation Asia strategic pillar is a commitment to spotlighting younger voices across public, business and government debate and engagement on Asia, recognising youth as a key driver of Australia's future success in the region. Through this work Asia Society Australia seeks to reimagine Asia literacy and empower the next generation of Australian leaders and young professionals to stay interested and engaged with the region, amidst restricted mobility, geopolitical tensions and economic upheavals.

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