



Connecting Lives, Sharing Cultures

Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century – Issues Paper

Submission by AFS Intercultural Programs, Australia

24th September 2012

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I. Introduction

AFS Australia is pleased to provide this submission in response to the Tasmanian Government's issues paper, *Tasmania's Place in the Asian Century*.

In March 2012 we provided a submission in response to the Federal Government's *Australia in the Asian Century Issues Paper* and our submission can be found at <http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/published-submissions>.

AFS Australia is a global education organisation that has contributed to intercultural learning for over 50 years in Australia by providing student exchanges with partners in over 80 countries. Through our decades of experience we have demonstrated the capability to connect people with in-country and in-context learning experiences.

In our submission to the Federal Government's process, AFS Australia argued that there is an urgent national economic, political and educational imperative for Australia to equip its young people with intercultural understanding and literacy. In 2008, the *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals on Young People* called for Australia's education systems to prepare young people to be global citizens.¹ This is a goal AFS Intercultural Programs has been contributing to since our inception.

The new Australian Curriculum has identified Intercultural Understanding as one of the seven general capabilities and being Asia literate as one of the cross-curriculum priorities. AFS Australia applauds this initiative as it provides an opportunity for a catalytic change towards educating and equipping young Australians to live and work in a globalised world.

We recognise that there is a general consensus, referenced in both the Australian and Tasmanian government issues papers, that what is holding Australia (and individual states) back in business, political and diplomatic relationships is the Australian community's general lack of intercultural competency. We believe education is a key driver to improve the intercultural competency of our community.

We know that through in-depth interaction with their host families, school friends and community, Australians who participate in an educational exchange program gain new social awareness, language competence, cultural knowledge and abilities, and capacity to deal with ambiguity. The intercultural experience for exchange students stimulates a new mindset and promotes agility in dealing effectively with people in different cultures.



Many exchange program returnees have been inspired by their exchange experience to pursue career choices in the diplomatic corps, to work for internationally focussed NGOs or to become academics focussed on international affairs. AFS research suggests emphatically that participants in intercultural exchange programs, when compared with their peers, have greater diversity in professional and social networks, are significantly more likely to pursue careers that involve working with other cultures, and are almost 50 per cent more likely to study, live or work abroad for extended periods (see a summary provided in Annex I).

2. About AFS

AFS is an international, voluntary, non-governmental and non-profit organisation. AFS's mission is to provide intercultural learning opportunities to help people develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to create a more just and peaceful world.

Globally, AFS has over 60 years of experience in international education with programs in more than 80 countries. In Australia AFS has operated for more than 50 years and over 10,000 Australians have studied abroad through AFS with a further 10,000 overseas students hosted in Australia since 1952.

AFS prides itself on being a world leader in student intercultural programs. In the late 1970's AFS became one of the first student exchange organisations to offer exchange programs with China. Since then, AFS Australia has developed extensive experience in hosting and sending young people from and to its accredited partners in 8 Asian countries – China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. In 2011 an accredited partner in the Republic of Korea joined the AFS Partner network.

At AFS we believe that living and studying abroad will prepare interested teenagers and young adults for the future in ways that no other educational experience can. Through immersion in a foreign culture, AFS participants expand their perspective and learn more about themselves in the process. Exchange programs build maturity as participants become more self-reliant and confident in their own abilities. By experiencing another culture, from the inside, but as an outsider, participants gain a deeper understanding of the world and take steps towards becoming responsible global citizens. Participants also develop useful skills for the future, such as fluency in another language, which can provide a competitive advantage when applying for university or in the workforce.

Programs offered by AFS are focused on increasing intercultural competence: the ability to engage effectively and appropriately with people of different cultures, whether encountered locally or internationally. Using experiential and structured learning methods, both participants and host families have the chance to broaden their perspectives and learn from



each other, developing their communication skills in the process. Strong ties are often forged between the family and the student, and a large number of former AFS participants remain in touch with their host families for the rest of their lives.

Foreign language competence is a key benefit of participation in AFS programs. In excess of 90 per cent of participants in AFS programs involving school and homestay experience of 5 months or more develop fluency in a second language during the course of their exchange. Competency in a second language coupled with intercultural understanding and awareness is providing AFS program participants with solid preparation to live, work and lead in a diverse global society.

Based on AFS's international research on the impact of its programs, which is summarised in Annex I, it is clear that providing opportunities for young people to experience intercultural and language learning through the support of a host family, host school and host community has a profound, lasting and life changing impact on all involved and that this is being increasingly recognised by governments, educators, corporates and the community around the world.

AFS Australia is one of 52 accredited national partners of AFS Intercultural Programs Inc., headquartered in New York. It is incorporated in Australia as a company limited by guarantee of its members. AFS Australia operates with a small staff, and is driven by hundreds of volunteers in all States and Territories working locally in schools and communities.

AFS contributes to the strengthening of intercultural understanding among four main groups of participants:

- The young people who travel to other countries on AFS programs;
- The host families who selflessly invite a participant from another country to live as part of their family;
- Volunteers who work to find and support host families, recruit participants, conduct orientations and facilitate adjustment of participants; and
- The schools and communities that provide the opportunity for AFS participants to experience life in another country from the perspective of the host country.

3. Response to the consultation questions

How can Tasmania best position itself to capture current and emerging economic opportunities in Asia?

Tasmania should ensure graduates of its secondary and higher education systems are Asia literate, globally aware and highly motivated to build long-term relationships in Asia.

It is already clear that Australia cannot rely indefinitely on resource exports that have in recent years dominated Australia's trade with the Asian region. Increasingly, Australia will depend on the export of services and niche products of a transformed manufacturing sector that will be attractive to a rapidly expanding Asian middle class. The demand for clean, fresh food will also provide substantial export opportunities for Australia. Tasmania is already well placed as a clean environment, with potential to expand produce exports that are likely to be in high demand, as well as providing medical, educational and a variety of professional services to people, organisations and countries in the Asia region.

People capable of engaging and making strong connections in Asia will be the critical success factor. Tasmania's investment in the Asia literacy of its people is an essential ingredient. In this regard, we note the observation of the AEF that "A five-year-old starting school in Australia in 2012 will enter the workforce just at the time India and China become the leading global economic powers alongside the United States."² The only way to truly maximise the opportunities presented by the Asian century is to ensure our young people possess the "knowledge, skills and understandings of the histories, geographies, arts, cultures and languages of the diverse Asian region."³

Discussion with any Asian student who has completed higher education in Australia is likely to reveal that their biggest regret is the difficulty they had in making Australian friends. We believe that relationships help form the foundation of career success and benefit commercial negotiations. Even if Australians work for a locally controlled organisation, they will increasingly need to be motivated and skilled to form relationships with people in Asia. Success in sustaining long-term relationships to benefit commercial arrangements and professional service engagement is potentially limited without this skill.

While Australia generally has a reputation of tolerance of diversity, tolerance alone will not drive the deepening of engagement with Asia. We need to increase the appetite of Australians at a young age to engage with people from Asian cultures and languages. We need to create an affinity among Australians with the people of our neighbourhood.

We believe that Australia needs to do a lot more to promote Asian literacy and this will become increasingly important. On recent trends Australia is not well placed. Barely 20% of students applying for AFS programs express interest in Asian destinations. If Japan is removed from the equation, the percentage is frighteningly low. Schools have been

abandoning Asian language teaching, justifying this on the grounds that student interest in Asian languages has waned. The teaching of Indonesian in Australian schools is threatened with extinction; teaching of Thai language is non-existent. Despite the general appreciation of the importance of China economically to Australia, the teaching of Mandarin to Australian-born students is also declining.

There are no short-term fixes. Across the country, including in Tasmania, we believe that attention needs to be given to teacher education to train more Asian language teachers; schools need the funding to resource Asian language curriculum in a crowded curriculum and demand driven world; students need career education to appreciate that their success in working life is likely to be enhanced by their ability to engage with and build relationships with people from diverse cultures, including people across Asia. Greater outbound mobility of young Australians is also likely to be an important contributor.

We appreciate the current financial constraints faced by state governments. AFS prides itself on its contribution to the intercultural agility of young Australians and notes that this has largely been achieved without financial support from government. However, we believe that there is a need to ensure alignment of policies across the whole-of-government, at the national and State and Territory levels to reflect the importance of and focus on Asia. We note that the policy approaches across the different state and federal governments is currently uneven, with some excellent initiatives in some parts of the country, and no progress in others.

For example, earlier this year the Victorian Education Minister announced that schools in that state would form 'clusters' to share resources (such as teachers) to teach foreign languages to primary and secondary school children. This project is part of that government's ambitious goal of every prep child learning a second language by 2015, and all students from prep to grade 10 learning a foreign language by 2025.⁴ The Victorian Government is also investing in its teachers by providing 25 scholarships each year for language teachers to improve their skills in addition to 45 scholarships to attract undergraduate students to train as foreign language teachers.⁵

We are strongly supportive of similar programs being developed across the country. These kinds of initiatives demonstrate a real commitment by the education system to develop the intercultural understanding skills of their students. Proactive resourcing and policy initiatives, such as that being rolled out in Victoria, will put young people in those states ahead of their peers in the years to come.

We believe that these kinds of policies demonstrate that there are creative and low cost ways of increasing language learning opportunities for students in those states where the government is willing to embrace the challenge.

- 3.3 How well prepared is Tasmania to receive Asian students?**
- 3.4 What actions should the Tasmanian Government, community and educators take to attract Asian students and ensure they have a positive education experience?**
- 3.5 Should the emphasis on delivering education be in-country, online or in Tasmania?**

People-to-people exchanges between Australia and Asian countries involving students, business people, volunteers, educators and government officials are a natural compliment to an active policy of engagement with Asia. Deep personal relationships underpin trade, cultural and investment flows, and these are more likely to be successfully negotiated through intercultural connection.

In recent years one of the biggest boosts to improving the Asian cultural literacy of young Australians has been supported by the Japanese Government through their funding of the JENESYS program which sponsored 2-week cultural familiarisation visits to Japan for over 1,200 Australian secondary students. While detailed follow-up research has not been undertaken, anecdotal feedback from participants suggest that this was highly effective in lifting interest in Japan among Australian youth. Participants report their ongoing interest in Japanese language and culture, and of undertaking further student exchange opportunities.

Outside of scholarship programs such as JENESYS, less than 20 per cent of applicants for AFS programs express interest in exchanges to Asia. Despite the importance of Asia to the Australian economy, our young people predominantly look to non-Asian exchange partners: the USA, Germany, France, and South America. Australia remains a popular destination for inbound students and in 2011 61 students were hosted by AFS in Tasmania on programs lasting between 4 weeks and 11 months in duration.

Of the 61 students that were hosted in Tasmania, there were 10 Japanese participants who attended Smithton High School for 4 weeks on an intensive English language program. This program provided the students, teachers and families of the Smithton community with a firsthand intercultural learning opportunity which was very positively received. Host families from within the school community were found for each student and the program was coordinated by a couple of staff members. Coordinating a program such as this is demanding and a challenge for schools that are not overly resourced. However, it is often these schools that benefit the most from this kind of face to face interaction and sharing with people from another culture. As a result of this positive experience in 2011, Smithton High School has indicated that they intend to host the AFS Japanese Intensive Language Program every second year.

- 4.2 What actions should the Tasmanian government, community and educators take to improve Tasmania's Asian literacy?**
- 4.3 Could more be made of students to improve Tasmania's Asian literacy?**

The policy intent expressed in the National School Curriculum priority of Asia engagement, and the adoption of intercultural understanding as one of the seven general capabilities to be delivered are fine policy objectives that AFS Australia welcomes and applauds. We believe the school experience of young Australians is the natural starting point for increasing Asian literacy. However, there is widespread concern that these goals are at risk of being aspirational in the absence of well-considered and coordinated plans to achieve them.

In April 2012 AFS Australia organised an Educational Leaders' Roundtable which focused on developing action plans for key stakeholders to work together to promote the Australian Curriculum goals of Intercultural Understanding and Asian literacy. The event was hosted by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority and attended by a cross section of educational leaders representing all school sectors, language teachers, school principals, and other interested bodies. Ms. Judith Timbs, former Principal of Ogilvie High School, and member of the board of AFS Australia was key in organising this event. Prominent Tasmanian educator, Sheree Vertigan, also made a strong input as President of the Australian School Principals Association. The Roundtable has met twice, and agreed on cooperative initiatives to support deepening of school engagement in the area of intercultural understanding and Asia literacy. Copies of Roundtable output documents are accessible from <http://www.afs.org.au/education/>.

AFS Australia is firmly convinced that the expansion of complementary outbound secondary student exchange programs that are carefully integrated with and attributed academic value by schools and education systems should be a key ingredient of any policy initiative to increase engagement with Asia. We note that this is a key tenet of government policy responses in Europe and Asia.

A compelling example in Asia is the active policies of the Japan government in providing direct support to inbound and outbound exchange in secondary and higher education to deepen connections and understanding between Japan and the Asia Pacific Community, reflected in the Japan-East Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths (JENESYS) Program, which provided a large-scale youth exchange initiative totalling USD 315 million, under which approximately 6,000 youths mainly from EAS member countries (ASEAN, Australia, China, India, ROK and New Zealand) were invited to Japan over five years.

Over the 5 years to 2011 AFS Australia has selected and oriented over 1,200 Australian secondary students to spend 2-weeks in Japan as guests of the Japanese Government, to



experience school and homestay experiences in Japan. Eighty Tasmanian students and 10 Tasmanian educators have participated in this program between 2007 – 2011. In 2012, AFS is working with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a similar program, the Kizuna Project, which will see 240 young Australians spend 2 weeks in Japan in December 2012, living with host families and directly observing the recovery efforts following the Great Eastern Earthquake and tsunami of March 2011. It is anticipated that around 25 students and 2 educators from Tasmania will be selected to participate in the Kizuna Project this year.

In addition to the Kizuna Project, the Japanese Government has also sponsored a variety of short-term and long-term projects focussed on Intercultural Learning for secondary and tertiary students as well as professionals. These include MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Scholarship) and JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program).

We believe that there is merit in a state government sponsored exchange program that has the clear focus of improving the Asian literacy skills of students and educators in that State.

4.22 What opportunities does your organisation see in the next phase of Asian growth?

The demand for inbound exchange opportunities to Australia has been very strong for the past 15 years and is currently without practical limit. Australia is seen as a safe, friendly and interesting host country for secondary exchange students, driven by:

- The global demand to learn English;
- Political stability;
- Economic growth;
- Australia's image as a fun place for young people; and,
- The pricing differential between student exchange, and full-fee paying educational opportunities in Australia.

AFS believes that inbound education opportunities that deliver foreign students a quality education with strong back and support, coupled with the opportunity to engage with Australians from the inside will continue to remain important over the coming years. AFS and others in the not-for-profit student exchange domain are well placed to provide support for these qualitative requirements.

After rapid growth in voluntary, non-fee paying student exchange in the 1970's and 80's the voluntary student exchange sector has, since the mid-1990's, been characterised by:

- Expansion of the number of organisations offering voluntary, non-fee paying student exchange opportunities. Some have global coverage such as AFS, and others are niche players specialising in exchanges between a small number of countries and themed experiences;
- An increasing number of schools offering student exchange as part of their school experience (including sister school partnerships, off-shore campuses etc.);
- Stagnation of the volume of outbound exchanges, in the regulated, non-school sponsored, non-fee paying student exchange sector at around 1,800 participants annually for the past 5 years;
- The belief among Australians, that because English is becoming the global language of business there is little perceived need to learn foreign languages;
- A tendency of school principals and teachers to regard outbound student exchange programs as “nice to have” but a distraction for their latter year secondary students preparing for entry to higher education;
- Increasingly complex regulatory supervision broadly coordinated by State and Territory authorities including:
 - Reciprocity requirements administered at the State and Territory level restricting inbound school based (non-fee) student exchange to the equivalent number (by participant months) of outbound exchanges for Australian secondary students;
 - Child protection regulations, including police checks of host families for inbound and outbound students and volunteers; assurance of support standards and risk management practices; and,
 - Regulation of local fundraising
- Competitive pressure resulting from payment of host families by full-fee paying foreign school and tertiary students; and,
- Demographic trends that have changed the capacity and motivation of people willing to volunteer to help administer student exchange programs.

Currently, organisations administering student exchange programs are required to respond to 8 State and Territory regulatory authorities, which, while operating on a broadly consistent set of national guidelines, operate on different interpretations of these guidelines. Reciprocity regulations apply separately in each State and Territory, rather than on an aggregated national basis and this rigidity hinders optimisation of hosting capacity.



AFS Australia recognises that given the long-term budget prospects, governments are unlikely to relax regulatory rules that require inbound hosting capacity of the non-fee paying exchange sector to not exceed outbound sending volumes, in large part to protect Australia's high value full-fee paying foreign student flows currently enrolling in Australian schools. However, we believe this approach is having a negative impact on the number of inbound and outbound students participating on student exchange programs with Asia.

AFS suggests that governments consider the partial or full relaxation of reciprocity restrictions on inbound exchange participants from Asian countries, or financial assistance to schools for inbound exchange participants in programs conducted by accredited exchange organisations, within exchange programs that provide structured engagement between Asian and Australian students and demonstrably contribute to interest and engagement in Asia by Australian students.

AFS Australia has recognised that the key to its future success within current government policy settings is to find ways to stimulate the number of outbound exchange participants from Australia. AFS Australia firmly believes that in the absence of significant financial subsidies, increased outbound secondary exchange is likely to be best accomplished by increasing the perceived value of outbound student exchange to Australian secondary students. We acknowledge that schools face many competing demands in meeting the needs of the constituents and are likely to experience challenges in creating additional initiatives for enhancing intercultural understanding and Asia. We at AFS stand ready to collaborate and develop complementary exchange initiatives that will assist schools in this challenge

AFS Australia has extensive experience in hosting and sending young people from and to its accredited partners in 8 Asian countries – China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand. In recent months, an accredited partner in the Republic of Korea has joined the AFS Partner network.

As an organisation whose purpose is dedicated to increasing intercultural understanding, AFS Australia is willing to work actively with governments to find cost effective means of expanding Asian–Australian engagement. AFS can draw on its global intercultural learning resources to underpin cooperation with educators to develop curriculum for intercultural understanding.

We suggest that government give consideration to supporting and investing in the expansion of student exchange in the following ways:

- I. Development and adoption of:
 - a. Guidelines for accredited student exchange programs on the integration of structured, curriculum relevant and assessable Intercultural Learning activities into their exchange programs;

- b. Protocols for assessment and reporting by schools of language and Intercultural Learning by Australian school students who have participated in accredited student exchange programs;
 - c. Standards for recognition of programs of Intercultural Learning completed by students towards secondary graduation; and
 - d. Guidelines for the encouragement of Intercultural Learning with respect to Asian countries across the entire primary and secondary curriculum.
2. Promotion of a more positive and supportive framework for encouraging school students to participate in complementary exchange experience involving school, homestay and language learning in Asian countries.
3. Funding the development of intercultural learning programs to ensure trainee teachers are equipped to implement the national curriculum capability of Intercultural Understanding and Asian–Australian engagement cross curriculum priority.
4. Funding professional development of existing teachers in Intercultural Learning.
5. Funding innovative initiatives to:
 - a. Create partnerships between Australian schools and communities, and schools and communities in Asia; and
 - b. Create curriculum resources that increase Intercultural Learning and interaction between children of the diverse cultures that are already present in Australian schools.
6. The partial or full relaxation of reciprocity restrictions on inbound exchange participants from Asian countries, conducted by accredited students exchange organisations, within exchange arrangements that provide structured engagement between Asian and Australian students and demonstrably contribute to Asia interest and engagement by Australian students.
7. Selective funding of initial exchanges between Australia and Asian countries in which there is currently little or no engagement in Australian schools – for example, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam, and Cambodia.
8. Further Government analysis of appropriate incentives for the not-for-profit sector in Australia to encourage young Australians to gain intercultural and language experience in those Asian countries which will be key to Australia’s economic and diplomatic future, in particular China, India, Indonesia and Japan.

AFS Australia would welcome the opportunity to participate in consultations conducted as a part of the *Tasmania’s Place in the Asian Century* white paper process on any of the above suggestions.



Annex I. Impact of AFS Programs: Research Evidence

By helping individuals develop more effective communication skills and improve their understanding of the unfamiliar, AFS gives its participants, host families and connected audiences better insights into the perspectives of people from other cultures. The resulting empathy prepares participants to better cope with ambiguity and difference in future situations.

Career and Academic Choices: Research has shown that AFS alumni have more diversity in their professional and social networks. They are also significantly more likely than their peers to have careers that involve working extensively with other cultures, and almost 50% more likely to live and work abroad for an extended period. Additionally, they often study abroad again at the university level.

Language Skills: The ability to speak and use a foreign language provides countless advantages in the workforce as well as in everyday life. The type of immersive experience provided by AFS exchange programs is one of the most effective ways to learn another language. Over 70% of AFS Participants achieved fluency in another language after the completion of a year studying abroad and AFS alumni are likely to have fluency in more foreign languages than their peers.

Intercultural Sensitivity: People who take part in AFS exchange programs show increased intercultural development and more global awareness. This is assessed using the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), a scale that identifies varying worldviews through which people perceive cultural difference. AFS Participants had significant improvement in their developmental score, as a group moving nearly 2 points on the scale away from ethno-centric tendencies towards an ethno-relative outlook that evaluates new people based on their values and perspectives.

Personal Development and Growth: AFS Participants experience dramatically lowered feelings of anxiety in new environments as a result of their time abroad. Not only do they feel more comfortable around people from other cultures, they are much less likely to view the world in terms of "them" and "us." In fact, a 2008 study on the long term impact of AFS exchange experiences (25 years post-exchange) showed that 39% of alumni felt it would be very desirable to live in a diverse neighbourhood, as compared to only 28% of their peers.

Some Useful AFS Sponsored Research

- *AFS Long Term Impact Study Report 1: 20 to 25 years after the exchange experience, AFS alumni are compared with their peers; Bettina Hansel, Ph.D. and Zhishun Chen, AFS International, April 2008* From <http://www.afs.org/afs-and-intercultural-learning/research/>



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- *AFS Long Term, Impact Study Report 2: Looking at Intercultural Sensitivity, Anxiety, and Experience with Other Cultures*, Bettina Hansel, Ph.D., AFS International, December 2008
From <http://www.afs.org/afs-and-intercultural-learning/research/>
- *Assessment of the Impact of the AFS Study Abroad Experience, An Independent Research Study Designed and Conducted by Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D. Hammer Consulting, LLC - www.hammerconsulting.com*; From <http://www.afs.org/afs-and-intercultural-learning/research/>

End notes

¹ *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, December 2008.

² Asia Education Foundation, 'Submission to the Australian Government, White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century', available online at <http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/published-submissions/A>, p. 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Amanda Dunn, 'Schools join forces to rescue languages', *The Age*, (5 February 2012) available online at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/schools-join-forces-to-rescue-languages-20120204-lqyzl.html>

⁵ Ibid.