

Asialink ‘Asia Capable Workforce’ strategy endorsed by Asian Century White Paper

For immediate release

The Prime Minister’s White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century has endorsed Asialink’s national strategy for Developing an Asia Capable Workforce.

“Asialink has worked with business to identify what the sector needs to do to build the Asia skills and Asia relationships of our workforce,” said Mr Sid Myer, Chairman, Asialink.

“The Asian Century White Paper is an important step in realising Australia’s economic and social potential, with new frontiers such as Myanmar opening up in terms of trade liberalisation and political reform.”

“The Gillard government is to be congratulated for having the foresight to recognise this and for overseeing the development of such an important roadmap for the Asian Century,” Mr Myer said.

In a report released last month, Asialink found that separate to the resources sector, Australia has the potential to lift economic performance with Asia by up to \$275bn over the next ten years, with improved Asia capabilities driving better access to, and penetration of, Asian markets.

The [Asialink report](#) was overseen by a Taskforce chaired by Mr Mike Smith, CEO of ANZ and comprising thirteen leading business figures from a range of sectors including finance, mining, telecommunications and education. The report identifies six individual and five organisational capabilities that are critical to business success with Asia.

“It is pleasing that the White Paper picks up on several of the recommendations of Asialink’s Asia Capable Workforce Strategy,” said Ms Jenny McGregor, Asialink CEO.

“The Strategy identified the importance of senior leaders in driving a successful Asia business strategy and the critical role of board members and executives with direct Asia experience.

“We welcome the White Paper’s recommendation that the Australian Institute of Company Directors look to integrate Asian cultural competency training into its courses, and we look forward to working with them and other business organisations to help build Asia skills and experience,” said Ms McGregor.

The Asian Century Business Engagement Plan, announced as part of the launch of the White Paper, is another step in the right direction. Its \$6m in grants-based funding, to be administered by Austrade, is likely to be especially important in enabling SMEs to engage with the region.

“SMEs employ the majority of the Australian workforce and as such they remain an important part of the solution, as illustrated in the recently released 2012 PwC Melbourne Institute Asialink Index,” said Mr Sid Myer.

However, there are many other pathways to Asia capability in the business sector that the White Paper has not touched on. The Asialink Asia Capable Workforce report recommended that business work with the education sector to develop internship programs in Asia and in Asia-focused Australian companies. Additionally, the potential benefits to Australian business from our multicultural society should not be underestimated. Asian Australian communities must be involved every step of the way as business looks to capitalise on the Asian Century.

Finally, the Asialink report made it clear that Asia capability must go beyond the senior leadership of Australian companies. “Whilst the White Paper does not provide explicit targets recognising the importance of Asia capability in the business sector beyond the board level, Asia capability must be viewed as a boardroom to factory floor effort and cultural competency can sometimes be even more important in customer-facing or middle management roles,” said Mr Sid Myer.

“Cultural competency courses should be made available to the Australian workforce more broadly, through a national Centre for Asia Capability as recommended by the Asia Capable Workforce Strategy.”

“Ultimately, the success of these recommendations will depend on the enthusiasm and support of the business sector.”

ENDS

Mr Sid Myer and Ms Jenny McGregor are both available for comment.

Related links

- [The Asialink Taskforce for an Asia Capable Workforce](#)
- [PwC Melbourne Institute Asialink Index](#)

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