



Asia Education Foundation

Languages curriculum fairer for all Australians

The Asia Education Foundation has welcomed the draft national languages curriculum as a fairer system for all learners.

Kathe Kirby, Executive Director of Asialink and the Asia Education Foundation (AEF), said today the *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Language* acknowledged that non-background speakers were seriously disadvantaged in learning script and character-based languages such as Chinese and Japanese.

This was a key message of research conducted by the AEF: *The Current State of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean Language Education in Australian Schools: Four languages, Four stories (2009)*.

“Our research provided evidence of the difficulty associated with learning these languages for some Australian students – and we are pleased the new curriculum recognises this in a number of ways,” Ms Kirby said.

“In particular, the draft acknowledges the enormous diversity of Australia’s multicultural society. It realises that different speakers come into language learning at all different levels, and it aims to accommodate each of them.

“Canada has French, the US has Spanish, and to a major extent the UK has French - they each have a natural second language.

“Australia is unusual in the world in its language diversity - very few other countries have no natural second language. Students, under this draft national curriculum, will be getting language learning at the level they need. That is really important - that has never been accommodated.

“This curriculum encourages “home-user” learners at a higher level, and it also helps students who have no second language at home to compete on a more level playing field.”

Ms Kirby said that importantly, the curriculum also recognises that some languages take longer to learn than others, making allowance for different language programs to be developed individually.

“For the English speaker, for example, script and character-based languages like Chinese and Japanese require more time to master. This is a welcome change.”

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The Asia Education Foundation (AEF) is a joint activity of Asialink at the University of Melbourne and Education Services Australia. The AEF aims to equip young Australians for the 21st century by ensuring that they all gain knowledge, skills and understandings of the countries and cultures of Asia through their schooling.

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