



Asialink
Level 4, Sidney Myer Asia Centre
The University of Melbourne
Parkville Victoria 3010

20 May 2022

Mr. Gary Cowan
First Assistant Secretary
North and South Asia Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Australian Government

Email: India75@dfat.gov.au

Dear Mr. Cowan,

Submission on shaping the Centre for Australia-India Relations

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written submission regarding the direction of the Centre for Australia-India Relations, a high-profile platform to promote Australia-India ties.

I attach the Asialink submission, responding to the questions included in your request for submissions.

We have listed several possible initiatives which Asialink would be pleased to discuss further once the Centre is established.

This submission complements those from the University of Melbourne and the Australia India Institute, both long-term and respected partners.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely

Martine Letts
Group CEO and Director of Operations

Submission: Shaping the Centre for Australia-India Relations

Asialink welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to help shape the direction of the new Centre for Australia-India Relations. Asialink strongly supports the establishment of the Centre and the efforts of the Federal Government to enhance Australia's bilateral relationship with India, including the Update to the Economic Strategy and AI-ECTA, which will lay the foundation for expanded trade and investment.

Asialink is Australia's leading centre for creative engagement with Asia. We develop insights, capabilities and connections through our programs in the Arts, Business, Diplomacy and Education. Asialink's mission is to build more effective and closer relations between Australia and Asia, including with India.

Established in 1990 as a joint initiative of the Australian Government's Commission for the Future and the Myer Foundation, Asialink is hosted by and works closely with the University of Melbourne. We also work closely with the Australian India Institute.

Asialink and India

Our ongoing work on India complements DFAT's objectives by enabling Australia's business, arts and education sectors and government partners to deepen their understanding and engagement with India. Chair of the Asialink Advisory Council, Peter Varghese AO, was the author of the original India Economic Strategy and his expertise and leadership positions Asialink well to help strengthen Australia-India engagement.

Asialink Business is a driving force behind business engagement with India, working with businesses and government to develop the capacity to succeed in India's complex business environment. We draw on our in-house India expertise to advise Australian businesses seeking to grow in the market. For instance, we recently developed a market entry strategy for an ASX-listed consumer products company. We work with Federal and State Governments to design programs and policies to support business engagement. We were pleased to work with DFAT on the development of the Australia India Business Champions initiative, including facilitating the first meeting. The Vice Chancellor of The University of Melbourne, Professor Duncan Maskell, is one the Australian champions. We also publish in-depth reports that build business understanding, such as *Frugal Innovation in Medical Devices and Technology: the India Opportunity*. Our capability development programs empower Australian businesses and assist the development of a highly skilled workforce that can better engage India.

The Asia Education Foundation has made engagement with India a key feature of our school engagement strategy through establishment of the Australia-India Bridge Program, which has connected 56 schools across Australia and India since 2015. We are also committed to supporting and empowering school leaders through the Women in School Leadership (WISL) Principal exchange programs and are now looking to engage Vocational Education and Training (VET) teachers in schools across Australia and India through the VETConnect Program, further expanding and strengthening school engagement.

Asialink Arts has supported arts and cultural exchange and development in India for 30 years with an Australian alumni group of more than 150 artists and arts workers. Activities have included bilateral residencies and creative exchanges, delegations, participation in conferences and forums and touring exhibitions. Through this long-term engagement we have built a consistent reputation and established institutional and individual networks.

Asialink Diplomacy has strengthened connections and networks between Australia and India and supported more effective and closer diplomatic relations. It has deepened and expanded the quality of discussions between the two countries and supports research on key issues in the relationship. Asialink has convened several Track 1.5 and Track 2 Dialogues that have strengthened Australian-Indian ties such as the 'Conversations' between Australia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Japan and India.

1. What should the Centre seek to achieve and what should its work be guided by?

Asialink welcomes the formation of the Centre and its capacity to build upon long-standing and strong ties. Asialink believes that the Centre can increase collaboration with India through expanding the work of current Australian institutions such as Asialink, The Australia India Institute and the University of Melbourne, which have the established ties, capability and track record to build Australia's capacity to engage with India.

Asialink believes the Centre's work should be guided by the following principles:

- Sustained and coordinated programs of activities across sectors, that are both broad and deep.
- A focus on iterative and multi-year program funding arrangements that can ensure successful long-term outcomes and the development of people-to-people links over time.
- Advancement of cross-cultural competencies to enable autonomous engagement.
- A strong focus on gender equality and social inclusion in all programs, with the scope of the Centre's work reaching into businesses and communities in regional and rural areas.
- Application processes, assessments and requirements that reduce burdens on applicants.

2. What should the Centre do to promote practical cooperation with India?

Asialink proposes that the centre work to enhance practical cooperation between Australia and India across key areas such as arts, business, education and diplomacy.

To fulfil the potential of the Australia-India relationship and move towards a future of practical cooperation, the Centre needs to invest in the next generation of leaders. The Centre should provide opportunities for Australian and Indian students to engage with one another and start developing the capabilities for cooperation within the school sector. Education is a pillar of the Australia-India relationship and building capabilities is a lifelong endeavour. To address this, the Centre should:

- Engage students prior to them entering tertiary education, such as offering Indian languages in primary and secondary schools.
- Connect Australian and Indian schools in sister-school relationships, such as through the Australia-India BRIDGE School Partnerships program run by the Asia Education Foundation (AEF).
- Provide and fund opportunities for professional development for Australian and Indian teachers, school leaders and education experts to engage, learn about and collaborate with one another.
- Provide and fund opportunities for Australian and Indian VET teachers to learn about, and from, each other through a community of practice, such as the AEF's VETConnect program.
- Support Indian students studying in Australia to undertake paid internships in Australian businesses, not-for-profits and the arts sector.
- Develop services that enable young Australian and Indian artists and creative industry workers to access relevant reciprocal markets and audiences.

Additionally, there is an important opportunity to develop diversity in institutional and people-to-people links across the arts and cultural landscape such as state and private museums, educational institutions, festivals and grassroots initiatives. This multiplies the use of public platforms and reaches diverse audiences. Australian artists, producers and designers have been at the forefront of cross-sector and inter-disciplinary collaboration. In India there is a deep cultural understanding of cross-sectoral engagement and fluidity. We should develop services that enable Australian and Indian artists and creative industry workers to access reciprocal markets and audiences.

3. What type of bilateral events do you think would enhance policy dialogue?

We recognise the importance of engaging diverse participants in policy dialogues. Diversity and inclusion directly translate to more relevant, impactful and higher quality discussions. As such, a focus on youth and women directly engaging in policy dialogue would enhance and enrich the bilateral relationship.

If Australia and India's shared future is to be realised, young Australians and young Indians - the next generation of leaders - need to know about each other and understand the vibrant, modern democracies of both nations. Asialink proposes a program whereby Indian and Australia students can discuss policies and actions relating to areas of significance in the bilateral relationship. By building people-to-people links in this cohort of future leaders, this program would work to build a sustainable and long-lasting partnership between the two countries.

Additionally, we propose a program that engages Indian and Australian women, so their voices are heard on issues affecting them. This program could address power imbalances within society, policy, institutions and law. It would enable women to contribute to policy that directly impacts on their lives.

4. What initiatives could help engage Australia's Indian communities in support of the bilateral relationship?

Asialink welcomes the recent report *Australia's Indian Diaspora: A National Asset*. We recommend the next step be development of a strategy to leverage the diaspora, particularly to grow the economic relationship. This strategy should focus on key sectors prioritised by our governments. It could include initiatives such as digital platforms to connect individuals and businesses to access commercial opportunities, and programs targeted at middle and senior management. It might also cover the role of the Australian expatriate community in India.

The arts and creative industries provide a crucial bridge to understanding people and histories, helping build empathy and trust between people and nations. Cross-cultural capabilities and business competencies will help build relationships, to enable mutual trust to grow, and for commercial collaborations to be structured in ways that are mutually beneficial.

Indian international students are a significant proportion of the student body within Australian tertiary education for the creative industries and arts, including architecture, design, fashion, curation, art, music, writing and journalism. Strengthening opportunities for professional integration of this student body within the Australian creative industries would nurture collaboration and dialogue. Asialink proposes a program to highlight the contribution of India diaspora youth to the arts sector, which would help them engage with topics related to the relationship and highlight the next generation of artists.

5. How can the Centre help business build its India literacy and connections?

India business capability is sorely lacking in the Australian business community. While some businesses are enthusiastic to visit India, Asialink believes that appropriate preparation delivers better commercial outcomes. The Centre should go beyond a narrow concept of 'India literacy' and focus on building 'India business capability' by improving market and sectoral knowledge, increasing understanding about business practices, strengthening cultural intelligence and facilitating connections.

The Centre can help build connections between business communities, including the Indian diaspora, to improve understanding and strengthen learning. It should focus on promoting two-way trade, outbound investment, and long-term engagement. Information resources will extend insights to the wider community. By making Australian business leaders more India-capable we can broaden Australia's trade and investment partnerships.