

# Getting I-n-t-e-n-s-e about Chinese

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## The Goal

In 2010 the Commonwealth Government and the Australian National University established the *Australian Centre on China in the World*, a research body that aims to realise a national capability in the study of China. This builds on the goal of all Australian governments of *at least 12 per cent of students completing Year 12 fluent in the languages of our key Asian neighbours – China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea – by 2020* (Commonwealth Minister for Education, October 2009).

## BUT:

In numbers, Year 12 is currently about 3000 students short of its target in Chinese

In standard, Year 12 classroom learners of Chinese are well short of the desired competence

## The Means

To meet the proposed target would require providing a *frequent, intensive* and *long-term run* at Year 12, comprising content learning and real use in class, employment of ICT for greater practice and use, and periods of all-day immersion in Australia and in China.

*Frequent* = at least an hour a day = 200 hours per school year

*Intensive* = (virtually) all class time in the language

*Long term-run* = (at least) Grade 5-Year 12.

Just 1% of the cohort working this way would lift the numbers by 2000 and the standard to the desired level, especially if the top 20% increased to 2 hours a day in senior years.

Aimed at stimulating interest and cross-sectoral cooperation in providing more intensive Chinese studies, the Chinese Teacher Training Centre in conjunction with the Asia Education Foundation introduced a range of intensive language teaching-learning modes to the National Asia Literacy Network held at the University of Melbourne on October 18-19, 2010.

Invited participants from all States and Territories heard presentations from academics.

Principals and teachers experienced in intensive language programs and discussed purposes, content, management, methods and outcomes.

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## Getting *I-n-t-e-n-s-e* About Chinese

### The Goal

*All Australian governments have agreed to a target of at least 12 per cent of students completing Year 12 fluent in the languages of our key Asian neighbours – China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea – by 2020 (Commonwealth Minister for Education, October 2009).*

### 1. Numbers

12% of Year 12 students nationally taking one of the four Asian languages: Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean.

The national Year 12 cohort of 2020 began school in 2008. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, they number 265,746, and on current trends, 74.3% of them can be expected to continue to Year 12. This means there will be 197,449 students in 2020 taking Year 12. 12% of that figure is 23,694. How this number is to be divided among the four languages has not been said, but a modest proposal is that the Chinese share might comprise one third = 8,000 students.

Currently there are about 5,000 students in total (= all streams) doing Year 12 Chinese. That means we are short about 3000 to reach the 2020 target.

Most of the current Year 12 students are Chinese background speakers and virtually all background speakers learn Chinese and do not drop out. As their numbers are likely to remain steady, any increase in candidates at Year 12 must come from the non-background students.

In straight numbers, no new programs are needed. If just 35% of the non-backgrounders who start Chinese now were to continue, the 3,000 more students in Year 12 would be found. This is the percentage Japanese manages to hold on to, but it would mean holding some 6 times the number of non-background learners of Chinese than happens at present.

### 2. Standard

*To significantly increase the number of Australian students becoming proficient at learning the languages and understanding the cultures of China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea (NALSSP Guidelines 2010, DEEWR).*

*Fluent and proficient are very imprecise terms, but both connote very high quality language competence involving deep, usable knowledge and easily accessed, fluid oral expression.*

Could 3,000 non-background learners of Chinese be brought to such a level in Year 12 by 2020?

**Under present conditions, NO.** We could predict that only the 4,500 or so first language and background home speakers taking Year 12 Chinese could be so proficient. Probably **none** of the non-backgrounders would be at that super competent level. BUT, it could be done.

**To get non-Chinese background learners to super-competent level – proficient in DEEWR terms – would take a much more frequent, intensive and long-term run at Year 12 than is now available. For example:**

## A Sample Program Design

### Structure

#### Stage 1

*Frequent* = at least an hour a day = 200 hours per school year

*Intensive* = (virtually) all class time in the language

*Long-term run* = a frequent, intensive program from Grades 5-8  
= a total of 800 hours over the 4 years

#### Stage 2

(a) 80% continue 1 hour a day in Years 9-12 = 200 hours per year

(b) 20% increased to 2 hours a day in Years 9-12 = 400 hours per year

= (a) 1600 hours in total, Grade 5-Year 12

= (b) 2400 hours in total, Grade 5-Year 12.

### Content

The Program would comprise content learning/practice and real use, in class, using ICT, and in periods of all-day immersion in Australia and in China.

### Students

650 x Grade 5 students x 4 States = 2600 students – about 1% of the cohort

Assume ABS predicted gradual drop out of 25% by Year 12 → 2000 left by Year 12

Stage 2 (Years 9-12)

400 out of the 500 in each state to continue 1 hour per day

100 out of the 500 in each state to continue 2 hours per day

### Results

2000 non-backgrounders in Year 12 = two-thirds of the target, at the desired standard:

1600 very strong in today's terms, having had 1600 hours of frequent, intensive Chinese

400 truly superior in Chinese = fluent, accurate, literate, knowledgeable, astute.

### Provision

Volunteer schools (all sectors) commit to the Stage 1 and Stage 2 (a) program

Stage 2 (b) program provided in dedicated schools with high achieving, all rounder volunteer students, drawn from across the State. This follows the practice of the very successful dedicated Science High School in Adelaide, which seeks interested students, who show some area competence and other intellectual ability, not just clever mimics. It is a method which also spreads the opportunity across the State; and prevents any one or two regular schools from losing their entire top stratum (a documented dampener on school standards), as can happen if all programs are in one locality.

Other schools would continue to be encouraged to offer a normal program in Chinese language.