

Universities Australia

(ACN 008 502 930 - ABN 53 008 502 930)

Chief Executive Officer:
Dr Glenn Withers AO

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Mr Paul Griffiths
Director
Indonesia-Australia FTA Feasibility Study
South-East Asia Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
R G Casey Building
Barton ACT 2600
Indonesia.ftastudy@dfat.gov.au

Dear Paul

Indonesia-Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Feasibility Study

Strong links have been established between Australian and Indonesian universities, dating back to the early years of the Colombo Plan. Many senior Indonesian university and government staff are alumni of Australian universities. Such long-established relationships have engendered a high degree of cultural understanding, without which partnerships cannot be successful.

A survey conducted early this year revealed that there are 118 formal agreements between Australian and Indonesian universities, covering student exchanges, study abroad programs, staff exchanges and academic and research collaboration.

While recognising the export-based approach to international education, it is important that the Indonesians see Australian universities as partners, not merely providers of education. Research is of immense significance and there are opportunities for Australian universities to work collaboratively with Indonesian universities. Student and academic mobility and exchange are seen to provide the basis for friendship, mutual respect and understanding, just as education is the key to prosperity, security and peace in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Mobility and exchange lead to increased transferability of skills and facilitate participation in the global workforce. The importance of continuing relationship building, including through two-way flows of students and staff cannot be over-emphasised. Unfortunately, the tragic incidents which occurred in Indonesia a few years ago and the resultant travel warnings have discouraged these exchanges and collaboration.

The Indonesia-Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would be a way of promoting closer contact between Indonesians and Australians at the people-to-people level, particularly in the areas of education, health and environmental services.

One Geils Court
Deakin ACT 2600

GPO Box 1142
Canberra ACT 2601
AUSTRALIA

Ph: +61 (0)2 6285 8200
Fax: +61 (0)2 6285 8211
Mobile: +61 (0) 416 249 350

ceo@universitiesaustralia.edu.au
www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au

Jamie Mackie remarked in a paper published earlier this year by the Lowy Institute on the special importance of educational links and cultural exchanges in building the relationship:

It is very much in our national interest to achieve the closest possible degree of engagement with Indonesia at the people-to-people level through a building of bridges that will span the cultural differences between us and put as much 'ballast' into the relationship as possible through personal, institutional and commercial links. Closer educational links and other cultural exchanges will be of special importance here. Successful engagement with Indonesia along these lines will also help greatly towards achieving deeper engagement with Asia in due course. (Jamie Mackie, *Australia and Indonesia: Current Problems, Future Prospects*, Lowy Institute Paper 19, 2007).

The following issues, including market access issues, are of significance to the university sector –

- (a) Measures promoting the growth of Indonesian languages and studies in Australia.

In order to fully engage with Indonesia and to facilitate an effective Free Trade Agreement, Australians need to know more about Indonesia.

In this regard we note that the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has stressed the importance of Asian languages and studies in outlining the new government's 'education revolution'. One of the first heads of state to extend congratulations on his election victory was the Indonesian President and Prime Minister Rudd has already foreshadowed an official visit to Indonesia in 2008 as well the forthcoming meeting in Bali in early December 2007.

- (b) Accessibility of information concerning Australian tertiary study to Indonesians.

- (c) The removal of certain visa and work experience impediments which may discourage Indonesian students and academics from visiting Australia, including:

- Cumbersome Australian visa processes for Indonesian students and visiting academics.

Indonesian students need to be provided with better advice on and assistance with the visa system in place such that their visas are processed in a timely manner and such that they are fully aware of the rules regarding their visas.

- Restrictions on Indonesian students (at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels) seeking work experience in Australia.
- Difficulties faced by Indonesian students securing visas, including tourist visas, for short-term, customised or informal programs and training courses in Australia.

One university suggested the creation of a visa for short course/informal training, similar to the professional development visa, but without the requirement for a surety of \$100,000.

An FTA should allow Indonesian students greater opportunities while in Australia. This is important as a means of enhancing people-to-people connections.

- (d) The removal of impediments for Australians going to Indonesia, including:

- Hostile travel warnings against travel to Indonesia (and related risk-avoidance measures taken by Australian universities).

- Cumbersome Indonesian processes (requiring lengthy applications and long waiting times via the Indonesian Institute of Social Sciences and then on arrival and departure Immigration, Internal Affairs, Police) for Australian researchers.
- Restrictions on Australian students seeking work experience in Indonesia.

- (e) Growth in and support for programs like Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies (ACICIS).

The ACICIS program allows students from Australian member universities to study for a semester in a high quality study program at an Indonesian partner university (see <http://www.acicis.murdoch.edu.au>). If in-country study of Indonesian language were more accessible for both high school and university students, this would greatly enhance the capacity of Australian students and future generations to engage with Indonesia. At present high school students are dissuaded from studying Indonesian language because schools are unwilling (given the DFAT advice) to take student groups to Indonesia. This is having a flow-on effect to the study of Indonesian language at universities such that fewer graduates have any understanding of Indonesia.

- (f) Continuing strong support for programs such as Australian Volunteers International.

This program had its genesis in the Volunteer Graduate Scheme for Indonesia and was pioneered by graduates of the University of Melbourne (most notably the late Herb Feith).

- (g) An exchange or fellowship program for Indonesian and Australian academics to spend time at, and do some teaching in, Australian or Indonesian universities respectively. A major impediment to this is lack of funding.

- (h) Recognition of qualifications.

It is noted that the Department's *Background Paper for Industry Consultations* refers to "the fact that the Indonesian Department of National Education (DNE) does not recognise the Australian three-year Bachelor degree as equivalent to the Indonesian Sarjana (S1)", on the grounds that the S1 requires a minimum of four years of study, without considering the relative teaching, learning and assessment styles.

Universities Australia agrees that this is an important impediment to Australia's exports of educational services to Indonesia. The comparison of Indonesian and Australian degree programs is more complex than the simple comparison of the number of years studied. The higher level of specialisation, different assessment structure, and increased independent learning and research components of Australian degree programs need to be taken into account.

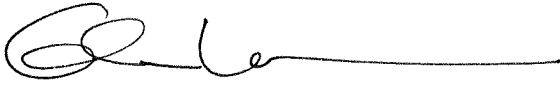
Universities Australia actively promotes the principle of qualifications recognition based on comparability of outcomes rather than 'time served'. This approach should be consistent in all FTA negotiations.

- (i) Recognition of Intellectual Property.

An FTA should strengthen the understanding of Intellectual Property (IP) issues in Indonesia and recognise that clarity concerning IP issues will create an effective environment for intellectual and research collaboration between Australian and Indonesian universities as well as Indonesian industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this study. We look forward to being advised of the outcome.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'G' followed by a long horizontal line.

Dr Glenn Withers AO
Chief Executive Officer