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Go8 Stakeholder Submission on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the United Arab Emirates (UAE); and the Free Trade Agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The Group of Eight (Go8) represents Australia's leading research-intensive universities. We thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for the opportunity to provide input. Please note that this submission represents the views of the Go8 network, and member universities may choose to make their own submissions.

Please note that we are happy for this submission to be published and have no wish for any of it to be treated as confidential.

The research-intensive nature of Go8 member universities means they are heavily involved in international engagement. This is not coincidental. Strong international connections are the hallmark of high-quality institutions globally – so much so, that measures of “international outlook” and “internationalisation” are included in the Times Higher Education¹ and QS² World University Ranking systems methodologies.

International engagement takes many forms. It can include international students, international staff, engaging in research collaborations, undertaking contract research for international organisations, and other activities. As we have noted in previous submissions to DFAT, international connections underpin higher education and research excellence by connecting the best researchers and academics from around the world to accelerate the advancement of human knowledge; help to give Australia a voice in key international policy discussions; and help to position Australia as a quality destination, to enable an inflow of international talent.

The impact of COVID-19 has laid bare just how much Australia relies on the latter. Recent Go8 industry engagement with both the engineering and health and medical sectors have made it clear that our nation faces critical workforce shortages that have the potential to impact the economy and national prosperity. Ensuring we are – and remain – attractive to international talent while rebuilding our own domestic capacity pipeline should be a national priority in the post-COVID era.

¹ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/world-university-rankings-2022-methodology>

² <https://www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings/methodology>

International engagement is also important to the diversification of the sector. Students will not pursue education services at destinations that are perceived poorly, or of which they are unaware. Re-building our national reputation as an outward looking, engaged, responsible regional partner, with internationally recognised, highly ranked universities, is the foundation upon which diversification will be built.

The extent of Go8 universities' international engagement is reflected in our performance, including:³

- Being consistently the highest ranked Australian universities across the major international ranking systems, with seven of our members ranked in the top 100 in the world, and all ranked in the top 150 universities in the world (according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the Times Higher Education Rankings (THES) and the QS World University Rankings (QS)).
- Educating over 150,000 international students both on and offshore.
- Supporting more than 73,000 jobs in Australia through our international students.
- Generating \$1 million in economic impact for every three Go8 international students.
- Accounting for more than half of all collaborative Australian research papers.
- Attracting research funding from industry and other non-government sources that is twice that of the rest of the sector combined.

In this context, the Go8 supports strong Government to Government agreements with strategic partner nations as important signals of willingness to engage. For this reason alone, they assist high quality universities in establishing, expanding or extending engagements with quality partners worldwide. But they also offer opportunities to achieve agreement on specific mechanisms to facilitate engagement in education and research.

UAE and GCC Countries

There are several opportunities for Go8 universities in the region, especially given the interest coming from some of these oil and gas dependent nations in transitioning to more diversified economies.

Priority opportunities have been identified in mining, health, digital technology and business. The Australian Saudi Business Council has also identified opportunities for engagement around education, health, agriculture / food technology and infrastructure.

There are also research opportunities that should be explored. Go8 universities conducted around 52% of research collaborations between Australia and the nations of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar during 2017-2021. Though the absolute number of co-publications was relatively small (at around 5,700), the quality was high, with an impact value of three times world average.⁴

³ https://go8.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Go8-Facts-of-Distinction_web.pdf

⁴ As measured by CNCI, the Category Normalised Citation Impact. Data sourced from InCites, extracted on the 7 April 2022. <https://help.prod-incites.com/inCites2Live/indicatorsGroup/aboutHandbook/usingCitationIndicatorsWisely/normalizedCitationImpact.html>



The Go8 would be pleased to engage with DFAT on possible measures that could be incorporated into FTA / CEPA negotiations to facilitate engagement, **noting that the recently signed Australia-UK FTA contained the first ever chapter focused on innovation.**

The main challenges experienced by our members in building their relationships in the region in recent years relate to the unattractiveness of our higher education offerings due to the closure of our borders forcing course delivery to move online. This resulted in a number of these governments suspending scholarships.

Now that Australia's borders have re-opened, we are hopeful that these issues may have been addressed.

However, ensuring that Australia's immigration and visa processing teams are sufficiently resourced to allow for efficient processing of applications could assist to re-establish Australia's reputation as an attractive destination.

We would urge the Government to use its diplomatic channels to reinforce the message that Australia has re-opened its borders and is seeking to engage.

We also encourage the Government to seek opportunities for engagement with high quality Australian research through the Saudi and Middle East Green Initiatives.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

Yours sincerely



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CHIEF EXECUTIVE