

Consultation on the development of Australia's international development policy

30 November 2022

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the consultation to set the long-term direction for Australia's international development engagement.

ATN is the peak body representing Australia's six most innovative and enterprising universities: Curtin University, Deakin University, RMIT University, The University of Newcastle, University of South Australia and University of Technology Sydney. ATN teaches almost 90,000 international students studying in Australia, making it the second largest grouping in Australia for international enrolments. Our network enrolments focus on China, South Asia and ASEAN regions.

As former Prime Minister Julia Gillard has said on many occasions, "If we want our world to have the fairest future, then we must bring education's power to those now denied it."¹

The transformative nature of education is undeniable as evidenced by its inclusion in all international development policies as a primary lever. It touches on most aspects of delivery of international development and is heavily featured in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

ATN makes the following recommendations to embed education and inter-cultural exchange into Australia's international development policy to mutual benefit.

Recommendations

1. Build a resilient international education sector by incorporating opportunities for students to learn and grow through overseas experiences that build on Australia's social enterprise throughout the region either through the New Colombo Plan or a re-established AsiaBound program
2. Embed entrepreneurialism capability throughout the Asia-Pacific region by harnessing the work Australian universities undertake with SME and industry partners
3. Incorporate a clearly articulated role for Australian universities into Australia's international development policy that caters to the lifelong learning needs and requirements of our Asia-Pacific neighbours including:
 - Enhance the academic quality and capability throughout the region by utilising networks of university partnerships through knowledge exchange
 - Improve academic capability through the Pacific by harnessing Australian consortia expertise in mentoring and leadership
4. Encourage continued progress of recognition of Australian qualifications throughout the Asia Pacific region and embark on recognising qualifications from countries within our region

¹<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2013/10/09/julia-gillard-discusses-making-education-a-global-priority-and-offers-advice-to-girls/>

Governing architecture

Changes of government at a federal level have typically meant a change in focus, particularly on the quantum of international development funding (aid) as well as the nature of aid Australia embarks on within the Asia-Pacific region.

The Albanese Government has a clearly articulated international development policy which is driven by Australia's values, interests and identity. It seeks to implement this policy with Australia's sovereign capability in mind, balanced with a deep commitment to a stable and prosperous region.

Australia's Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), conducted in 2018 is a national snapshot of the work Australia has undertaken domestically and internationally on the SDGs. The SDGs form the most widely agreed upon approach to understanding sustainable development - every UN member state agreed to the SDGs in 2015. The 17 Goals map out a holistic approach to sustainable development and are all interconnected. Both are useful for determining the role of Australia in any new policy and performance framework detailing development program activities.

Australia's international education sector

Australian universities, through Australia's international education sector, provide a critical pillar that supports Australia's development, diplomatic, trade and investment effort.

Australia's role in fostering the potential of younger generations through the now defunct AsiaBound, Endeavour Scholarships and Australia Awards cannot be understated. Through the work of these mobility programs, research collaborations and DFAT's global alumni strategy, Australia's universities make a significant contribution to Australia's international development, foreign policy and soft diplomacy objectives.

COVID-19 has been the most significant disruptor to Australia's international education sector since the opening of international education places in 1989. There has never been a more important time to build a resilient international education sector by incorporating opportunities to learn and grow through overseas experiences that build on Australia's social enterprise.

There is a valuable opportunity to support the Government's \$1.4 billion investment over four years from 2022-23 to rebuild Australia's international development program, re-establish Australia as a partner of choice in the region and enhance regional security and cooperation. Notably, this funding includes \$900 million to increase support to the Pacific region and \$470 million to increase support to Southeast Asia.

Recommendation 1 – Build a resilient international education sector by incorporating opportunities to learn and grow through overseas experiences that build on Australia's social enterprise throughout the region either through the New Colombo Plan or a re-established AsiaBound program

Students are increasingly socially aware and seeking opportunities to pursue social enterprise and maximise their social impact. The success of programs such as AsiaBound and the New Colombo Plan also demonstrates that students are seeking opportunities to learn and grow through overseas experiences.

Setting some mission-oriented goals targeting development and practical assistance in the Pacific and Southeast Asia could also be harnessed within the international development policy. Cross over with Albanese Government policy, Startup Year, could be a useful mechanism to utilise. It would also provide an opportunity for Startup Year students to network and cooperate with each other, in the same way previous mobility programs have harnessed student alumni.

Recommendation 2 - Embed entrepreneurialism capability throughout Asia-Pacific region by harnessing the work Australian universities undertake with SME and industry partners

More work is needed to encourage enterprise-based learning / entrepreneurialism. This can be achieved through work integrated learning, industry-linked research positions, and employer-driven apprenticeships, cadetships and internships; and ensuring entrepreneurialism capability is enhanced across the region. Enterprise-based learning will allow entry-level and existing cohorts of workers to be skilled, re-skilled and up-skilled.

This and other forms of work-integrated learning help ensure the relevance of learning and ensures skills can be immediately applied and reinforced. It helps build cohorts of learners within a single company, area or industry, and allows content to be more rapidly adapted to emerging trends and needs within industries. Work-integrated learning opportunities that foster connections with international companies and global industries also ensures Australia and Australian industries benefit from global innovations.

Collaboration between government, the education and training sector and industry will become increasingly important to equip workers with necessary skills.

Harnessing the work of Australian universities, particularly those within ATN, conduct with industry and small-to-medium enterprises will ensure that the region's capability in entrepreneurialism continues to rise. As illustrated by the Productivity Commission's recent report into Australia's productivity, this is important because investment in human capital is critical to a nation's economic recovery and productivity growth.

Recommendation 3 – Incorporate within Australia's international development policy a clearly articulated role for Australian universities to cater to the lifelong learning needs and requirements of our Asia-Pacific neighbours.

Given education services are Australia's biggest service export, there is clearly a role for Australian universities to cater to the lifelong learning needs and requirements of our Asia-Pacific neighbours. This will allow a deep familiarity to develop with the Australian education system, including qualifications and institutions, which contributes to their prestige and standing internationally. It will encourage overseas students to consider Australia as their primary education destination - which maintains Australia's competitiveness against other destinations like Canada - and will also increase the desirability and employability of Australian graduates overseas.

There is clearly a role for Australian universities' provision of flexible lifelong learning to be applied here that would benefit not only Australia's domestic students but also our significant international student population. The aspiration would be that Australia's international alumni, across the Asia-Pacific region would significantly benefit from these measures, but that they would not need to leave their home country to secure these skills.

Successive Australian Government international development policies have recognised that tertiary education is an important component of any investment in development. These need to be more than words on a page. Any new policy and performance framework must demonstrate how it will balance the ongoing work and development of Australia's higher education sector and the sector's contributions on the world stage in assisting developing countries within the Asia-Pacific region.

Recommendation 3a) Enhance the academic quality and capability throughout region by utilising networks of university partnerships through knowledge exchange

International development should always have mutual benefit at the core of its activities. One of the simple ways of articulating a clear role for Australian universities to assist in the region is to harness their skills, knowledge and capability and encourage partnerships focused on knowledge transfer. Enhancing academic quality and capability starts with an understanding of best practice in the region and the excellence Australian universities provide in an Australian context. We then need to encourage mutually beneficial partnerships between Australian universities and those in the region, specifically targeting shortfalls in governance, quality and capability.

Recommendation 3b) Improve academic capability through the Pacific by harnessing Australian consortia expertise in mentoring and leadership

Further to a clearly articulated role for Australian universities to cater to the lifelong learning needs of the region, we should encourage the sharing of Australian expertise through targeted mentoring and leadership programs in specific regions like the Pacific.

By focusing on a specific region, it allows Australian universities to tailor the sharing of best practice to specific audiences. Harnessing the examples of best practice that occur in most Australian universities and focusing on academic-to-academic mentorship, as well as holding leadership programs, harks back to the tried and proven success of past work – like Australia Awards.

Recommendation 4 – Encourage continued progress of recognition of Australian qualifications throughout the region

Australia’s Foreign Policy White Paper in 2017 set out ways in which it can increase recognition of Australian qualifications and licensing and create new opportunities to export professional services through international agreements – both vitally important to Australia’s higher education sector and to the Asia-Pacific region. These aspirations should be retained within future agreements and be further built upon, with creative thinking applied to solutions specific to the region or country applicable to the agreement. In addition, we would encourage Australia to recognise the qualifications of countries within our region.

Conclusion

In our submission to the development of Australia’s international development policy and framework in 2020, ATN proposed that the aspirations representing Australia’s higher education sector be bolder and be more courageous. ATN recommended that the following considerations be incorporated into the new government policy and performance framework being developed for the Asia-Pacific region:

That the Government

- Broaden its focus beyond international education as a service delivery export industry to also include international opportunities for research and industry collaboration
- Continue to advocate for the easing of impediments to transnational education through formal bilateral negotiations
- Support Australia’s global research ambitions to guarantee a seat at the table on regional large-scale, long-term research projects and partnerships

These remain key priorities for the sector’s international engagement.

ATN Case studies of engagement within the region:

Curtin University

Polio hit Naprey Almario when he was eight years old – paralysing him from the waist down – but it never stopped him looking out for opportunities. After gaining a master degree at Curtin, he now runs two businesses in his home country of the Philippines, heads an organisation for disability advocacy and lectures at a local university.

After completing a degree in information technology in the Philippines several years ago, Almario established a small business, Almario Ticketing Services, and engaged several people who have disabilities.

He decided that postgraduate study would both enhance his business skills and help him with advocacy for people with disabilities. He applied for an Australia Awards Scholarship – an Australian Government initiative for young people in particular countries who demonstrate future-leader qualities – and enrolled in a Master of Information Systems and Technology at Curtin.

He believes that in gaining his master degree he’s become more empowered to advocate for people with disabilities. He currently leads a non-government organisation in the Philippines called Association of Differently-abled Persons.

Deakin University deliver a leadership course through the Australia Awards in Indonesia program, that empowers women from diverse faiths and aims to increase women’s participation in the public sphere.

Over two weeks, the 25 awardees from Indonesia participated in a wide variety of site visits, focus group discussions and technical training to develop their knowledge and skills to support gender equality in their communities and workplaces in Indonesia.

The awardees were able to develop meaningful linkages with Australia at the individual and organisational level through seminars, workshops and site visits that provided them with an expanded set of resources and strategies that can be adapted to their local contexts in Indonesia.

Alumni from the program in 2017 and 2018 have gone on to run successful local-level projects in Indonesia, including in areas such as legal literacy in family law, social media training for youth, raising awareness of gender equality in schools, and anti-radicalism.

RMIT University

The Australia Vietnam Policy Institute (AVPI) is Australia’s first policy institute focused on its relationship with Vietnam. Established in partnership by RMIT University, Asia Society Australia, Asialink Business and the Australia Vietnam Leadership Dialogue in February 2022, the AVPI is a growing community of Australian businesses, State Governments, education institutions, non-profits and think tanks passionate about the Vietnam opportunity. In its first year of operation the AVPI has cultivated an active Knowledge Partner network of 25 organisations, as well as engaged more than 100 businesses in roundtable discussions about two-way trade and investment.

Through bringing together this strong and growing community focused on Vietnam, the AVPI is creating a platform for knowledge exchange around bilateral opportunities and challenges. This dialogue is assisting Australian businesses and non-profits to leverage peer learnings and foster new collaborations, providing a front-door for Vietnamese businesses and government looking to engage with Australian industry, while also providing insights to inform more responsive public policy and government programs. These activities are helping both Australia and Vietnam to boost development and contribute to a more sustainable shared future in Southeast Asia.

The University of Newcastle

Ronnie Aiolupotea

Chief Cybersecurity Officer, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Samoa

Master of Information Technology 2017

Australia Awards recipient 2016

Ronnie Aiolupotea earned a Master of IT from the University of Newcastle and is putting his skills to good use in Samoa's expanding digital economy. As the country continues to develop and progress its telecommunication capacities, Ronnie's role is to manage spectrum allocations. By buying and controlling radio frequencies, Ronnie ensures that this communal resource is used responsibly for the good of the Samoan people. 'The most important thing is that we take people's views on board and make sure there is proper consultation, so people are aware of what's going on,' says Ronnie.

Studying at the University of Newcastle broadened Ronnie's perspective as he came into contact with many diverse cultures. After living with people from across the globe including Iran, the Philippines and Vietnam, his view of other cultures, religions and worldviews developed. A University of Newcastle degree is recognised not only in Australia and Samoa, but across the world, and it has given Ronnie many opportunities for work in the region.

University of South Australia

The University of South Australia undertakes numerous study tours in different disciplines in the Pacific region. A small sample of these is included below:

- UniSA Allied Health and Human Performance Study Tour to **Kiribati** – departure May 2023
 - Podiatry clinical placements in Kiribati - This project is an ongoing clinical placement activity in Kiribati, in collaboration with Motivation Australia (MA), enabling podiatry students to work with the local health services and community.
- UniSA Justice & Society Study Tour to **Fiji** – departure 2023
 - Environmental Law in Fiji - The aim of this tour to Fiji is to provide UniSA Law students with a deeper understanding of environmental law and environmental issues impacting Pacific Island nations. The tour will examine the legal system of Fiji with respect to the implementation of the Paris Climate Change Agreement and students will examine the cultural, economic, societal and technological capacity of Fiji to implement the agreement as signed by them.

University of Technology Sydney

University of Technology Sydney (UTS), through the Aus4Innovation program, partners with universities, industry and government to deliver a sustainable technology transfer model for Vietnam. This program of activity investigates how to make technology more accessible to SMEs in many different industries. Utilising this model of sustainable technology transfer researchers have enhanced Vietnam water systems management by utilising data engineering, analytics and the Internet of Things. Government policy has been influenced and this has led to removal systems being implemented for arsenic and ammonia.

Further enquiries should be addressed to:

Executive Director

Australian Technology Network of Universities

info@atn.edu.au