

ATN Submission

ATN submission to DFAT consultation on new international development of policy for the Indo-Pacific region.

ATN Recommendations

1. The policy and performance framework being developed for the Indo-Pacific region give thought to ways in which Australian universities can play a role in catering to the lifelong learning needs, potentially through micro-credentials, of Australia's Indo-Pacific neighbours, to ensure that their future of work needs are being met.
2. The Government incorporate the aspirations contained within the Foreign Policy White paper namely:
 - ways in which, through international agreements, it can increase recognition of Australian qualifications and licensing; and
 - ways in which it can create new opportunities to export professional services

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.

3. The Government incorporate into the new policy and performance framework being developed for the Indo-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
 - Continues to advocate through formal bilateral negotiations, for the easing of impediments to transnational education
 - Supports Australia's global research ambitions to guarantee a seat at the table on large scale, long term research projects and partnerships

About the Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) and International Education

Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) is the peak body representing Australia's four most innovative and enterprising universities: University of Technology Sydney, Curtin University, RMIT University, and University of South Australia. Our universities are home to over 190,000 university students. Among them are over 1,700 Indigenous students and some 23,000 students from rural or regional areas. ATN also encompasses an additional 15,000 vocational education and training (VET) students.

ATN teaches 13.7 per cent of Australia's growing international student population.¹ 33.4 per cent of enrolments at ATN Universities were by international students, compared with a national average of 30.7 per cent.²

¹ Australian Department of Education statistics 2018

² Ibid

Australia's international education sector

Australian international education and research provided by Australian universities is a critical pillar that supports Australia's diplomatic, trade and investment effort.³ Australia is the third largest provider of international education services (UNESCO 2016), and international education is Australia's third largest export, contributing \$32.4 billion to Australia's economy in 2017-18.⁴

Australia's role in fostering the potential of younger generations through the New Colombo Plan, the now defunct 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 are making significant contributions to Australia's foreign policy and soft diplomacy objectives.

Governing architecture

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 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 Foreign Policy White Paper sets out ways in which, through international agreements, it can increase recognition of Australian qualifications and licensing and it can create new opportunities to export professional services - both vitally important to Australia's higher education sector. 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.

ATN proposes that these aspirations representing Australia's higher education sector be bolder and be more courageous. ATN recommends the Government incorporate into the new policy and performance framework being developed for the Indo-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 collaboration⁵
- Continues to advocate through formal bilateral negotiations, for the easing of impediments to transnational education⁶
- Supports Australia's global research ambitions to guarantee a seat at the table on large scale, long term research projects and partnerships⁷

These were initially raised in the Universities Australia submission to the Foreign Policy White Paper consultation and remain key priorities for the sector's international engagement.

³ Universities Australia submission to the Foreign Policy White Paper consultation, 2017

⁴ Trade investment at a glance, 2019

⁵ Universities Australia submission to the Foreign Policy White Paper consultation, 2017

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

Future of work



The world economy is changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of present (and future) wealth. Technology is driving much of this process, with information technology, biotechnology, and other innovations leading to remarkable changes in the way we live and work. As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. Countries need to educate more of their young people to a higher standard—a degree is now a basic qualification for many skilled jobs. The quality of knowledge generated within higher education institutions, and its availability to the wider economy, is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness. This poses a serious challenge to the developing world.⁸



The changing nature of work will require Australians and their Indo-Pacific regional counterparts to engage with post-secondary education throughout their careers – lifelong learning. Upskilling and reskilling are two distinct paths driven by different learner and employer needs and both avenues need to be appropriately catered for. Given education services are Australia’s third biggest export, there is clearly a role for Australian universities to cater to the lifelong learning needs and requirements of our Indo-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.

Another key enabler for those looking to re-engage with education is the relationship they have with their alma mater. This is the same for international students as with domestic students. The connections between university and alumni ideally act as an open door, allowing learners to plug back in to the lifelong learning cycle if and when they need to. Being able to develop these skills and engage with international partners will be a key skill for many careers.

To support the continuing professional needs of their graduates, Curtin’s international alumni chapters organise, and host seminars tailored to their alumni’s preferences and learning needs. In May 2017, Curtin hosted a seminar in Hong Kong around the challenges, innovations and current major projects of the Hong Kong metro system. Alumni had early access to this event, attendees were provided with continuing professional development (CPD) credit for the time spent attending the seminar. The CPD seminar program highlights how universities can collaborate with their alumni and professional accreditation bodies to meet students lifelong learning needs, even internationally.

⁸Peril and Promise – Higher Education in developing countries, World Bank, 2000

In 2017, RMIT University launched a pilot to create an innovative suite of micro-credentials, developed with industry partners and open to all students (including international students). The micro-credential portfolio, called RMIT Creds, comprises 11 key capabilities, incorporating a range of transferable, enterprise and technical skills. They range from 30 minute snippets to several hours of learning which can be stacked or clustered to create more extensive programs spanning the equivalent of five to six weeks. RMIT has developed a set of quality and design principles including high engagement, creative content, authentic assessment and evidence. Upon successful completion, students may claim a digital badge and have their achievement recorded on their official transcript.

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, scattered throughout the Indo-Pacific region would significantly benefit from these measures, but that they would not need to leave their home country to secure these skills.

The Australian Government's development policy *Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability* recognises 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 needs to 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 the assistance of developing countries within the Indo-Pacific region.

Globally, political uncertainty is having an ever-increasing impact on domestic policy in Australia. Universities are already reporting impacts on student numbers relating to Brexit, seemingly disconnected from the reality that the UK has left the EU. This has in turn meant an upswing in student numbers in Australia and Canada. It is important for the Australian Government to recognise that changes to Australia's foreign policy settings can have unintended consequences for Australia's international education sector. This has been particularly evident in any domestic policy discussion on foreign interference and China's influence within Australia.

Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)

8/1 Geils Court Deakin ACT 2600

E: info@atn.edu.au

T: +61 2 5105 6740