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Committee Secretary
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to inquiry into funding for public research into foreign policy issues

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Committee's inquiry into the funding for public research into foreign policy issues.

The Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at the Australian National University (ANU) encompasses the Department of Pacific Affairs, Department of International Relations, the Department of Political and Social Change, and the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

The School undertakes research and teaching focused on the Asia Pacific region and enjoys a close and productive relationship with many government agencies focused on foreign policy, especially the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of Defence. The Bell School also provides undergraduate and graduate coursework and higher degree research (ie PhD) training to domestic and international students. Its student body is marked by its high quality – the School has educated many senior members of the Australian public service and of foreign policy agencies in the region and engages members of the foreign policy community at home and abroad in its teaching. This means Bell School alumni are engaged in the practice of foreign policy, building strongly on their Bell School teaching and their cohort.

The following recommendations draw on the Terms of Reference numbered (a-f), reproduced here:

- a. current funding by Australian Government departments and agencies in this area;
- b. the quality and diversity of publicly funded think tanks focused on foreign policy;
- c. ways of enhancing greater public understanding of foreign policy issues;
- d. how the Australian Government involves states, business, civil society, unions, universities, think tanks, diasporas and the wider community in developing and implementing foreign policy;
- e. strategies the Australian Government should adopt to build the knowledge needed to support more effective future foreign policy; and
- f. any related issues

Recommendations:

1) Facilitate visiting fellowships for academics within the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) and other relevant government departments and facilitate equivalent fellowships for government staff within universities (a) (c) (d)

The Coral Bell School has a productive relationship with the foreign policy sector. The School manages several large research programs funded by DFAT, and its researchers regularly brief staff in the foreign policy and intelligence agencies on issues relevant to their research expertise. There is evidently a strong demand in government for in-depth knowledge on the politics, societies of our region. Likewise, Bell School academics relish the opportunity to engage closely with the foreign policy community and inform and shape their own research. A vigorous, targeted and informed exchange of ideas benefits all parties.

At the moment these exchanges are extremely valuable, but are relatively ad hoc. There is an opportunity to engage in more regularised reflective exchange. A fellowship model in two parts would facilitate an even more productive relationship between academic and the foreign policy community.

The first part of this model should adopt the example provided by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Knowledge Exchange. Initiated in 2017, this program facilitates the secondment of academics into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for 0.6 to 0.8 FTE for 24 months. Secondees, known as fellows, bring fresh thinking, depth and breadth of expert knowledge and apply their learning to policy challenges. The scheme builds new capacity in the FCO and across the UK research base and building long term, two-way relationships.¹

The second part of this model would see government foreign policy staff offered a university secondment as a visiting fellow. The fellowship would be relatively short term and would focus on secondees working on big, 'sticky', complex problems which would benefit from engagement with the whole of the university. These problems might include, for example, pandemic response in South-East Asia— engaging with medical specialists, political scientists and urban geographers to understand the spread of and local response to pandemics in urban environments. Another might include energy politics in our region, liaising with engineers, economists, political scientists and climate scientists to understand the geopolitical and technical challenges which drive the issue.

¹ <https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/ahrc-esrc-fco-knowledge-exchange-fellowship-guidance/>

Government secondees would access not only university staff but the deep and wide-ranging networks many academics have across academia and the broader community. At the ANU, such a secondee would be housed in the Coral Bell School, with an academic dedicated to help them navigate access to experts from across the university, and funding dedicated to help the secondee organise a workshop with experts of their choice. Such a fellowship would provide an opportunity for secondees to engage fruitfully with the broader community, especially if opportunities were provided for public engagement or publication on their research project, dependent on sensitivities.

(2) Support long-term, institutional research partnerships at the program level (a) (d) (e)

Provision of sustained, targeted research funding to research institutions at the program level is the most effective way to build knowledge to inform future foreign policy'. The Coral Bell School has benefited from the provision of long-term and scaled funding support from the DFAT for Pacific research through the Pacific Research Program (PRP) (\$18.75 million over four years). That support has enabled the development of a trust-based, institutional research partnership between government and ANU researchers. Long-term funding from government - complemented with significant co-investments from ANU - has supported the establishment of a dedicated Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA) within the Bell School. This in turn has enabled a broad-fronted, policy-focused research agenda that responds to emerging foreign policy issues. It also provides indirect benefits that further contribute to Australia's long-term foreign policy interests such as supporting strong research relationships with regional tertiary institutions and a comprehensive undergraduate and post-graduate teaching program, including many students and academics from the Pacific region. The strong partnership focus of the PRP has strengthened the responsiveness of the research relationship, improving its relevance to foreign policy development in the Pacific region. The committee should consider adopting the PRP model to other foreign policy challenges.

(3) Facilitate foreign policy funding based on a 'challenge' model (a) (c) (d) (e)

The ANU, and especially the Coral Bell School, benefits from traditional government funding for higher education research, especially competitive research grants. The School is also successful in obtaining research funding from government sources outside traditional higher education funding streams. Securing funding of this sort rightly take many years to secure and requires careful and strategic management by ANU academics and their DFAT counterparts.

There are other opportunities for targeted funding by government agencies which the committee may wish to consider. A fund focused on foreign policy challenges, for example, could be easily communicated to the public,

and allow competitive applications from a range of actors including universities. The fund could also allow other actors to double the funding – groups of alumni, for example, or business actors, and include a requirement to engage broader public audiences in the questions and challenges involved.

(4) Invigorate research relationships with foreign policy actors across government (d) (e)

The Coral Bell School's relationships are primarily with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Defence. But foreign policy engages a number of actors across government, from the Department of Home Affairs to the Department of Agriculture. At present, there appears to be little visibility of the opportunities offered by relationships with social scientists in departments outside historically foreign policy focussed departments. At present, government approaches to such relationships across a range of government foreign policy actors appear to be limited by several factors, including a perception that security risks outweigh the benefits of such contact, time pressures, and a lack of experience or visibility of these sorts of relationships.

Government efforts to increase the impetus on departments to engage with the academic sector—and other sectors offering knowledge on the region—would be useful for both parties and the broader community. An invigorated relationship could result in increased opportunities for briefings for staff posted to the region, or longer-term relationships developed to address particular policy problems which benefit from in-depth knowledge—the politics and drivers of drug policy in Thailand, for example, or the shifting politics around various smuggling routes in the region. The development of such relationships would also facilitate applications for existing sources of research funds within government and within the higher education sector (such as linkage grants, for example) by building relationships, contacts and trust between the two sectors.

Government should encourage the building of such relationships as part of performance reviews for relevant personnel, with metrics including productive contact made with various actors, including but not limited to academia, and the allocation of research funds where appropriate. Graduate program convenors should be encouraged to build such contact into their training programs, building engagement with the broader community into graduate training.

Sincerely

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