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Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
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## **Go8 Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade on the Funding for public research into foreign policy issues**

The Group of Eight (Go8) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (FADT) inquiry into funding for public research into foreign policy issues.

Please note the following represents the views of the Go8 which leads policy and advocacy for Australia's consistently leading-research intensive universities with seven of its members ranked, again consistently, in the world's top 100 leading universities. Each member Go8 university may submit its own related submission.

Also note that the Go8 is happy for this submission to be published and does not wish any of it to be treated as confidential.

The Go8 represents Australia's leading research-intensive universities, accounting for more than two-thirds of Australian university research activity and spending some \$6.5 billion on research annually.

Since 2003, the Australian Research Council (ARC) has awarded an estimated \$48.2 million in grants to Go8 universities for research related directly to foreign policy.

Without adjusting for inflation, the Australian Government investment in research and development in the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio has more than halved between 2018-19 (\$201.74m) and the budget estimate for 2020-21 (\$96.7m), which itself is also less than half the funding that was allocated a decade ago (\$198.66m in 2010-11)<sup>1</sup>.

Go8 universities play five critical roles in the advancement in Australia's understanding of foreign policy issues:

1. World-class research
  - Undertaking detailed, rigorous, specialised, and contextual world-class research on Australian foreign policy issues
2. Critical collaboration
  - Providing critical linkages into Australian foreign policy issues, information, and international knowledge exchange networks, fostering the development of both theory and practice with Australian Government officials and diplomats, civil society leaders, business leaders, and researchers

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<sup>1</sup> Science, Research and Innovation Budget Tables, Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, February 2021, <https://www.industry.gov.au/data-and-publications/science-research-and-innovation-sri-budget-tables>



### 3. Public outreach, dialogue, and engagement

- Hosting and participating in public events; providing public commentary and authoring articles that appear in the mainstream media; contributing to robust public debate and shared understanding on Australian foreign policy issues; facilitating multi-national and multi-sector dialogue and engagement

### 4. Educating domestic students

- Enhancing domestic Australian foreign policy skills and knowledge through research supervision and via a diverse range of university coursework offerings

### 5. Educating international students

- Investing in Australia's prospects for cross-national partnership by fostering mutual understanding of Australian foreign policy issues and approaches in future foreign leaders

Our expertise – and especially our independent public research expertise – is an immensely significant resource that can and must be better harnessed to deliver on these five core roles in Australia's national interest. Examples of significant case studies illustrating the valuable work undertaken in Go8 universities is provided at Appendix 1.

#### *Increasing geopolitical complexity*

The current geopolitical context is complex. The Australian Government is acutely aware of the challenges as evidenced by the recent additions and changes to various foreign policy legislation.

The need for world-class analytical research is more critical than at any other time in Australia's history. The peer-review of public research in Go8 universities – indeed, at all Australian public universities – is ubiquitous and provides the highest guarantee of quality, independence and accountability in research and analysis. This positions universities in a unique role compared with other organisations, institutes and think tanks that engage in foreign policy research. There is no doubt that effectively communicated, top-quality analytical research will lead to improved foreign policy outcomes for Australia. Developing our regional understanding also distinguishes Australia as a valuable member to our security partners, including the Five Eyes network.

Universities are also uniquely well-placed to act as open environments for multi-national and cross-regional public, government, industry and community dialogue during policy development, particularly evidence-led dialogue. The Go8 universities are very well connected across the Indo-Pacific given our long history of regional engagement, including the original Columbo Plan which has provided particularly strong connections and access with many alumni in key policy and leadership roles across the governments of Indo-Pacific nations. These regional networks are also 'vertically' integrated, with Go8 universities having extensive connections with rural – as well as urban – universities, industries, and community groups. Go8 universities are therefore well-placed to nuance policy developments and to educate on both macro-scale and micro-scale issues around the region.

Australia's research-intensive universities also possess a unique breadth of expertise that ranges beyond international political analysis and has direct relevance and to challenges facing Australian foreign policy. While research capability is critical to our global foreign policy interactions on many levels, an informed understanding of our neighbours is likewise vital to ensuring stability in the region and managing the unexpected. For example, cultural anthropologists, epidemiologists, and public health research experts are currently critical to understanding and responding to the challenges of COVID-19 transmission from Papua New Guinea to Australia. Universities enable cross-disciplinary research collaborations on complex Australian foreign policy concerns.



### *Developing our 'Asia capability'*

As an Indo-Pacific nation, Australia has a clear and pressing need to develop its 'Asia-capability'<sup>2</sup> as Asia will continue to be a predominant influence on Australia's economic prosperity and strategic positioning.

The importance of developing a greater understanding of differing cultures is essential to the development of a healthy democracy and to protecting Australia's security interests. This was recently highlighted by ASIO's Director General Mike Burgess in evidence to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security Inquiry into foreign interference, in relation to the value of hosting international students:

*"It generates economic, social and academic benefits and is important for diversity of thought in our national institutions. The continued collaboration between research institutions and their international counterparts is also important. Again, this kind of open collaboration, involving applying the best and brightest minds from across the world to a problem, is a key part of progressing research, innovation and critical thought that benefits our society more broadly."*

A key requirement in developing greater Asia-capability and cultural awareness is ensuring more Australians can fluently communicate in Asian languages. This is not a new concept – for example, the 2011 white paper *Australia in the Asian Century* recommended the Australian Government "[s]upport universities to increase the number of students who undertake Asian studies and Asian languages as part of their university education"<sup>3</sup>. This goal requires ongoing renewal. Given Australia's geographical location and the ever-changing geopolitical challenges emerging in our region, open and transparent communication is critical to our nation's security and economic development prospects. The decline in Asian language study in Australia is an issue that could benefit from dedicated investment in public research.

Asia-capability is about more than learning languages. A more comprehensive and widespread understanding of Asian societies, economies, cultures and history requires broad-based public research, upon which deeper conclusions can be learned, developed, and shared, and then deployed by Government for the benefit of Australia's society and economic prosperity. For example, public research into international trade in the Indo-Pacific has direct lessons for Government and business on how to strengthen and diversify Australia's trade profile, as well as position our research agenda to create (and capitalise on) the best future growth prospects in Asian markets.

Advancing Australia's 'Asia-capability' extends beyond public research and into university higher education. As Asialink at the University of Melbourne highlights in their seminal and still highly relevant 2012 report, *'Developing an Asia capable workforce – A national strategy'*:

*"...we can and should be doing more to build on successes to date and capture the benefits of Asian growth for Australia's long-term economic prosperity. This is a matter of urgency..."*

*For Australian businesses, one of the biggest impediments to realising the Asian opportunity is the absence or underdevelopment of critical individual and organisational capabilities."<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> As described in: *Developing an Asia capable workforce – A national strategy*, Asialink Taskforce for an Asia capable workforce, Asialink, University of Melbourne, September 2012, available at: [https://asialinkbusiness.com.au/uploads/documents/AsialinkBusiness\\_Developing-Asia-Capable-Workforce.pdf](https://asialinkbusiness.com.au/uploads/documents/AsialinkBusiness_Developing-Asia-Capable-Workforce.pdf); also recently recommended within the context of international trade in the Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth report, *Pivot: Inquiry into Diversifying Australia's Trade and Investment Profile*, February 2021

<sup>3</sup> p16, Government of Australia, *Australia in the Asian Century – White paper*, October 2011

<sup>4</sup> p4, above n1.



The report concludes:

*“Government must support the evolution of school, university and TAFE curricula towards Asia capability through funding and policy.”<sup>5</sup>*

Given the increasing importance of Asia to Australia’s future, we can only benefit by ensuring that there is dedicated funding for public research in Asia-capability in accordance with Australian Government’s strategic foreign policy priorities and targeted support for university education that develops Australia’s Asia-capable workforce and public research talent.

**Key points:**

1. The capacity for public research on issues relevant to Australian foreign policy is insufficiently utilised by Government.
2. Without adjusting for inflation, the Australian Government investment in research and development in the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio has more than halved between 2018-19 (\$201.74m) and the budget estimate for 2020-21 (\$96.7m), which itself is also less than half the funding that was allocated a decade ago (\$198.66m in 2010-11).
3. The Australian Government’s approach to commissioned public research on Australian foreign policy issues appears to be conducted on an ad-hoc, as-needs basis.
4. The greatest source of independent public research excellence on Australian foreign policy issues in Australia is contained within the research-intensive universities of the Go8, and this expertise is readily available to the Australian Government. However, this independence and institutional autonomy needs to be protected if universities are to remain effective.
5. Highest quality research is uniquely guaranteed in universities by the academic peer-review process.
6. Go8 universities have world-class capacities in collaboration, public outreach, dialogue and engagement, and education that complement and amplify its foreign policy public research excellence.
7. The Go8 universities are very well connected across the Indo-Pacific given our long history of regional engagement, including with both rural and urban universities, industries and community groups.
8. Universities are uniquely well-placed to act as open environments for multi-national public, government, industry and community dialogue during policy development, particularly evidence-led dialogue; we are ‘systems-integrators’ that bring a variety of organisations together and provide the evidence-based frameworks that enable research, education, training, outreach, and action.
9. Universities also possess unique comparative advantages in the independence of its research excellence and the capacity to undertake cross-disciplinary research collaborations on complex Australian foreign policy issues.
10. Australia’s future prosperity will increasingly rely on international relationships in Asia; developing and leveraging Australia’s ‘Asia-capability’ in public research excellence and via university education has never been more important.

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<sup>5</sup> p5, Ibid.



11. Australian universities provide the invaluable resource of Australian public researchers on foreign policy.
12. University enrolments in Asian languages continues to decline and is one of many issues relevant to Australian foreign policy that requires additional public research.

## Recommendations

1. The Australian Government should maintain consistency and certainty in its funding for public research on issues relevant to Australian foreign policy.
2. Funding allocated to research and development within the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio should be restored to at least 2018-19 levels (over \$200m).
3. Universities, especially Go8 universities, are research-intensive, independent, and possess collaborative cross-disciplinary breadth as well as depth. These comparative advantages should be considered when making decisions regarding foreign policy research funding allocations.
4. The independence and institutional autonomy of universities needs to be safeguarded in order to guarantee quality public research; the negative consequences of uncoordinated foreign interference legislation and other interventions upon universities needs to be carefully considered.
5. The flow of public money to non-university think tanks should be closely scrutinised and subject to regular value-for-money evaluations, as this funding is ordinarily not subject to competitive tender, review, or performance appraisal – unlike research funding support to public universities. Steps should also be taken to ensure that low-quality, non-peer reviewed research does not have an outsized impact upon Australia's foreign policy.
6. The Australian Government's approach to funding public research on foreign policy issues should be guided by the following principles:
  - a. Provide **flexibility**, both in terms of timeframes, and types of research outputs
  - b. Be guided by the **strategic priorities** of Australian national interests
  - c. Give regard to the ever-increasing importance of '**Asia-capability**' to Australia's future prosperity
  - d. Seek to **complement rather than replace** traditional technical assistance
  - e. Be **competitively** allocated
  - f. Be able to deliver, as appropriate, a '**research plus**' agenda that encourages or requires high quality research outputs to be amplified through collaborative exchange, public outreach, and/or incorporation into university course design and delivery.
7. Any strategy that seeks to build the knowledge needed to support more effective future Australian foreign policy requires an **increased and sustained investment in the university education of Asian languages, societies, economies, cultures, and history**. This investment would provide:
  - a. Better quality education to our future Australian foreign policy professionals and leaders;
  - b. A critical pathway to train and recruit future Australian research talent on foreign policy issues of increasing relevance to Australia; and
  - c. A necessary complement to a successful 'research plus' agenda (as per Recommendation 6(f)).



The Go8 looks forward to an ongoing engagement with the Committee and the Australian Government in enhancing our public research agenda on foreign policy issues critical to Australia's future national prosperity.

If you have questions regarding the Go8 submission, please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely

**VICKI THOMSON**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**



## **Appendix 1: Case Studies of Go8 expertise on foreign policy issues**

The Go8 hosts a wide range of public research and public outreach collaborations on Indo-Pacific and Australian foreign policy issues; a small, inexhaustive cross-section of examples is provided below.

### **Monash University – Australia-Indonesia Centre**

The Australia-Indonesia Centre is a bilateral collaborative research initiative established by both governments, leading universities, and industry, that is global in its outlook, bilateral in its ambition, and multi-institutional in its enterprise. Bringing together a consortium of 11 leading research and comprehensive universities – seven Indonesian and four Group of Eight institutions – the Centre advances people-to-people links in science, technology, education, innovation and culture.

Australia and Indonesia’s future prosperity is built on deep and enduring trade, diplomatic, cultural, defence and security linkages. The growing people-to-people links in science and technology adds another important dimension to the bilateral relations, and it is through these areas that two nations can come together as equals to solve complex challenges, promote a vibrant and contemporary understanding of each other, and reflect the maturing, long-term relationship between close neighbours.

Combined, the Centre’s universities have over one million alumni, teach more than 420,000 students annually and employ over 40,000 academic staff that specialise in at least 26 major disciplines – from anthropology to engineering, business to health, urban planning to renewable energy, social science to decision science.

The Centre invests in conscious relationship building that brings people together to tackle challenges and grow the network of people-to-people connections. These are the connections that can weather the occasional, inevitable turbulence between governments, that surpass and enhance official channels and create opportunities for enterprise, rapport and cooperation.

Examples of areas of their research effort include:

- Shared national challenges in energy, commodities, water and trade;
- Emerging opportunities in the digital space for Australia-Indonesia relations;
- Challenges and opportunities presented by Indonesia’s rapid physical and economic development;
- Opportunities in aquaculture, fisheries, and emerging marine products (particularly seaweed);
- Railway infrastructure planning.

For more information see: <https://australiaindonesiacentre.org/>.

### **The University of Melbourne – Australia India Institute**

The Australia India Institute is the premier Australian centre dedicated to the study of India and the bilateral relationship. The Institute produces quality, high impact research on contemporary India specialising in the areas of equity, education, health, infrastructure, and governance. It seeks to build Australia’s capacity for India-related research on key social, political and environmental challenges guided by the principles of *bharosa* (trust), *maryada* (respect), and *kalyan* (welfare).

The Institute wields significant influence in reshaping and developing relations, perceptions and scholarship opportunities between the two democracies of India and Australia. It has developed a strong reputation in foreign policy, research, education and the arts. Its publications, international conferences, public seminar series, events



and programs are changing Indian perceptions of Australia and have created opportunities for partnerships across key areas of the relationship.

The Institute also plays a crucial role in activating bilateral relationships between government, industry and the community and provides strategic advice to Federal and State governments on India engagement. It hosts the annual Australia India Leadership Dialogue, the preeminent bilateral forum for informal diplomacy. It has an affiliate centre at another Go8 university, the University of Western Australia.

Examples of areas of their research effort include:

- Improving Australian market access in India's higher education sector;
- Navigating strategic competition between India and China;
- Strategies to expand Hindi education in Australia;
- Leveraging Australia's Indian diaspora for deeper trade and investment relations;
- Surveying the economy, society, politics, and culture of contemporary India.

For more information see: <https://www.aii.unimelb.edu.au/>.

#### **The University of Western Australia – Perth USAsia Centre**

The Perth USAsia Centre is a non-partisan, not-for-profit institution located at the University of Western Australia which seeks to strengthen relationships and strategic thinking between Australia, the Indo-Pacific and the United States. The Centre is a leading university think tank focusing on geo-political issues, policy development, and building a strategic affairs community across government, business, and academia. Since the Centre's inception they have collaborated with over 150 different partners, hosted 580 events across 19 cities in 8 countries, and engaged with a world-class community of over 16,500 attendees.

The Centre focuses on issues of direct relevance to Australia and Western Australia's position in the region. It supports topics of regional importance through its rigorous programming and events schedule, independent research, and international outreach. The Centre also contributes significantly to nascent policy discussions and furthering the existing priorities of the Western Australian Business Community with the Federal and Western Australian Governments in international affairs in the Indo-Pacific.

Examples of areas of their research effort include:

- increasing an understanding of shared Australia-United States' concerns and interests in the Indo-Pacific region;
- enhancing Australia's profile, economic significance, and relations with countries in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia;
- deepening trade and investment relations with Indonesia.

For more information see: <https://perthusasia.edu.au/>.

#### **Australian National University – Development Policy Centre**

Based at the Crawford School of Public Policy in the College of Asia and the Pacific, the Development Policy Centre (or 'Devpol') is a university think tank for aid and development serving Australia, the region, and the global development community. The Centre undertakes independent research and promotes practical initiatives to





improve the effectiveness of Australian aid, support the development of Papua New Guinea and the Pacific island region, and to contribute to better global development policy.

Their discussion papers, policy briefs and reports make their research available for all, and their events are designed to both disseminate findings and to exchange information and ideas. The Centre runs the Devpolicy Blog, a platform that provides for the best in aid and development analysis, with a focus on Australia, the Pacific and Asia.

Examples of areas of their research effort include:

- Development effectiveness in the Pacific;
- Papua New Guinea's trade policy history;
- The electoral politics of Papua New Guinea;
- Allocation priorities for Australia's aid budget;
- Evaluating Australia's seasonal workers program.

For more information see: <https://devpolicy.crawford.anu.edu.au/> and <https://devpolicy.org/>.

### **The University of Sydney – United States Studies Centre**

The United States Studies Centre is a university-based research centre dedicated to the rigorous analysis of American foreign policy, economics, politics, and culture. The Centre is a national resource that builds Australia's awareness of the dynamics shaping America – and, critically – their implications for Australia.

Its mission is to make discoveries and draw insights with tangible value for Australian policymakers, businesses, scholars, students, and the general public, generated by independent, non-partisan, rigorous research delivered through communication, teaching and outreach.

Examples of areas of their research effort include:

- The evolving direction of Australia's alliance with the United States;
- Domestic politics in the United States;
- The evolving role and form of the Quadrilateral Dialogue (the 'Quad');
- Australia's navigation of the relationship between China and the United States.

For more information see: <https://www.ussc.edu.au/>.

### **The University of Sydney – Sydney Southeast Asia Centre**

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre builds on the expertise of – and facilitates collaborations between – over 400 University of Sydney academics who specialise in Southeast Asia. The Centre fosters partnerships and collaboration between researchers and practitioners working on critical real-world Southeast Asia issues, such as economic and social reform, infectious diseases, and the environment. Their vision is to make a real difference by informing decisions in government, industry, and the wider community.

Examples of areas of their research effort include:

- examining Indonesia's regional anti-corruption courts;
- disaster risk-reduction in South-East Asia;
- nutrition insecurity in regional Myanmar;
- managing diseases in tropical horticulture;



- the role of online media in political opposition movements in Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines.

For more information, see: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/sydney-southeast-asia-centre/>.

### **The University of Adelaide – Institute for International Trade**

The Institute of International Trade brings together leading academics, experienced trade practitioners and negotiators to address key challenges faced by businesses and governments seeking to expand trade and investment opportunities across the globe.

The Institute's primary objectives in its research is to respond and shape thinking on a range of key 'over the horizon' issues shaping the international trade and investment policy landscape from an Australian but also wider regional perspective. It produces quality academic journal articles and policy-oriented working papers, policy briefs, opinions outputs, and anchors its diversified teaching programmes in real-world issues and the latest academic and policy research.

Examples of areas of their research effort include:

- the multilateral trading system;
- a wide variety of substantive trade policy issues across the Pacific; East, Southeast, and South Asia; Europe; and sub-Saharan Africa, with a particular focus on developing economies;
- Australian trade policy and negotiations.

For more information, see: <https://iit.adelaide.edu.au/>.