

**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

**Inquiry into certain aspects of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual  
Report 2019-20**

**QUESTION ON NOTICE**

**Date of hearing: 13 September 2021**

**Outcome: Higher Education, Research and International**

**Department of Education, Skills and Employment Question No. IQ21-000122**

Mr Julian Hill MP on 13 September 2021, Proof Hansard page 16

***Australia Awards Scholarships program - DFAT***

**Question**

Mr HILL: Does the department have any advice? I'm not actually trying to create a headline or be difficult. We know that there are issues. I certainly know that from my electorate, as does Mr Hayes. We have a lot of similarities in relation to impact on diaspora communities from Vietnam and Cambodia. Particular concerns have been raised for some time about the Australian government's scholarship program in relation to Cambodia. It would be of genuine interest to get a sense of whether it's only these countries. I've had others tell me that there are concerns around Saudi Arabia and other illiberal regimes. It would be very helpful to us as parliamentarians to get some guidance from your precise intelligence of the sector about what other diaspora communities may be under threat or where there may be issues. That would give us a bit of a clue. Indeed, if we're all talking about transparency being absolutely critical in this, then I hope we can get some information back on notice.

Ms Jackson: I'll do my best on notice.

Mr HILL: Does the department have a comment on that?

Ms Sandercock: Yes. Thank you, Mr Hill. I'll comment in relation to the scholarship questions that you raised. This may be something that I will need to refer to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which has responsibility for the Australia Awards Scholarships program. We're certainly not aware of any of the specific allegations or concerns to which you refer; however, I will seek advice from colleagues at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The department of education runs a much smaller scholarship program known as the Destination Australia program. It is for both international and domestic students. We're certainly not aware of any allegations in relation to that program, but we're happy to come back to the committee after further discussions within government in relation to the Australia Awards.

Mr HILL: Thank you. That would be good.

**Answer**

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) has consulted with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which advised that it is not aware of any cases of Australia Awards recipients conducting foreign interference activities.