



Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Inquiry into opportunities for strengthening Australia's relations with the Republic of France

Submission from the University of Adelaide

Productive engagement with France has been a priority for the University of Adelaide, as it is for South Australia as a whole, and the University of Adelaide is proactively collaborating with a range of partners in France on research and education projects. The University of Adelaide's cooperation activities with France include:

- The University of Adelaide, along with the other two South Australian universities, is a key partner in a CNRS International Research Laboratory (IRL), with Naval Group as Industry partner. This is one of only five such international joint labs with an industry partner established by CNRS outside of France. This joint laboratory will focus on autonomous systems, human factors and artificial intelligence, in a range of key interdisciplinary research areas that are of strategic interest to both countries. This common structure will provide the Australian partners with the opportunity to access European funding, and grow the scope of cooperation as the IRL matures.
- The University has established two dual Master's degrees in the field of defence with ENSTA Bretagne (ENSTA) in Marine Engineering, and Ecole Centrale de Lyon (ECL) in Mechanical Engineering and Acoustics.
- A successful short program was created by the WASAA consortium ("Western Alliance for Scientific Actions with Australia" which brings together six Breton higher education institutions, ENSTA Bretagne, ÉNIB, UBO, École Navale, IMT Atlantique and UBS). This 3 week Summer School, held at IMT Atlantique, Brest campus, began in 2019 and is dedicated to Australian students from Bachelor level through to PhD with an interest in the naval industry. 8 students from the University participated in 2019 and 11 in 2020 as well as students from other Australian Universities (34 Australian students in 2020).
- The University has formed a strategic partnership with Dassault Systèmes (DS) to enhance the focus of its curriculum on digital technologies, including access to DS's 3DEXPERIENCE software platform, with extensive support from the Company's "Workforce of the Future" team. Dassault Systèmes' office in South Australia has been located on the University's campus since 2018, which has facilitated direct engagement with the company and its headquarters back in France.
- At the end of 2019, an agreement was signed with Dassault Systèmes and Capgemini to launch a collaborative education program to develop key workforce skills in the Marine and Offshore sector. The program, an industry-first, aims to create business value by equipping people with the skills needed to help compete in an economy where large collaborative international technology programs are key drivers for growth.

The University of Adelaide's researchers maintain strong relationships with counterparts throughout France in a variety of fields, from medicine to viticulture and oenology, engineering, the Arts, economics and French studies, among others. As shown in the above examples, a focus for the University of Adelaide is to build partnerships with defence-related institutions and organisations.

The University's experience of academic cooperation with France has been warm and productive. However, there are areas where the relationship could benefit from deliberate support from both governments:

1. Enhanced collaborative activities beyond the Future Submarine Program

The Future Submarine Program has proved a catalyst for academic cooperation between countries. However, the sensitive nature of the program has strongly limited potential cooperation activities that could take place under the auspices of such a strong strategic partnership. There is scope to consider cooperation activities that, despite being in or related to the defence technologies, are not tied to FSP milestones. A more aggressive pursuit of cooperation in areas such as cybersecurity, digital engineering, transcultural and transdisciplinary team performance and human factors, or biology, could engender a series of activities that are in synergy with the FSP rather than directly part of it and therefore magnify the impact of this considerable investment.

2. Greater coordination and consistency between both Governments on student programs

The French embassy is to be commended for its energy, enthusiasm and ability to initiate and deliver programmes that do support deep academic engagement and create life-changing opportunities for students. Perhaps an area for improvement is around administrative processes for these programmes, which are onerous and stressful for students. This is particularly the case for the unpredictable and difficult process where the local Direccte reviews the internship agreement ("Convention de Stage"). There is also a mismatch in expectations from both sides, as the range of financial support mechanisms is broader in France than it is in Australia, and there are very few long term support schemes in Australia dedicated to cooperation with France. It may also be beneficial for the embassies of both countries to coordinate their activities in order to maximise the opportunities for exchanges.

In summary, the University of Adelaide has been working to grow its cooperation with French institutions. As a research-intensive institution, our cooperation has been traditionally centred on areas of research excellence in both countries, and there is scope to grow the partnership around the experience of our students who will shape the future of our relationship, through exchange programmes and internships, particularly those in support of strategic relationships with industry or academic partners. Effective growth in this area requires active support from, and coordination between, both Governments.

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