

Education

Introduction

- 6.1 Australia and Malaysia share a strong history of educational links, dating back to the 1950s and the Colombo Plan. These links are a fundamental element of the broader bilateral relationship. The Department of Education, Science and Training has estimated that there are 250 000 Malaysians who are alumni of Australian educational institutes, who have helped develop strong ties between Australia and Malaysia across society, business and politics.¹
- 6.2 Australia is the largest overseas provider of education services to Malaysia and Malaysia rates as Australia's fifth largest source for offshore student enrolments in 2005. Education provisions to Malaysians include scholarship-based or full fee-paying university degrees, short courses, vocational and technical education, twinning programmes and various forms of offshore provision.

Government-to-government linkages

- 6.3 The Malaysian and Australian Governments are currently negotiating to renew the *Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Education (MoU)*, which formally expired in January 2006. The MoU

1 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 106.

underpins and formalises Australia's education relationship with Malaysia.²

- 6.4 In July 2005 the Hon. Brendan Nelson MP, the then Minister for Education, Science and Training visited Malaysia. Dr Nelson met with Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Najib, and the Ministers for Education and Higher Education, Dato' Hishamuddin and Dato' Dr Shafie. Dr Nelson also visited the International Islamic University of Malaysia, where he announced the creation of ten new scholarships for Malaysia, under the Endeavour Programme, for the two-way exchange of students.³

Institution-to-institution linkages

- 6.5 Australian educational institutions play an important role in providing offshore education services to Malaysian students, and contribute to capacity building in Malaysia. Though Malaysian students have traditionally travelled to Australia to study, university twinning arrangements and Australian university campuses in Malaysia now allow Australian students to undertake Australian courses in Malaysia.⁴
- 6.6 In 2004, there were 16 432 Malaysian students enrolled in Australian higher education institutions onshore and 12 539 offshore. Of these students approximately 90 per cent were enrolled at the undergraduate level.⁵ The most popular fields of higher education study are business administration and management (33 per cent) and engineering (15.3 per cent).⁶
- 6.7 Malaysians have traditionally favoured Victoria as a destination for study (39.6 per cent in 2005). Recently, however, there has been diversification with Western Australia and NSW growing in popularity, with 19.4 per cent and 14.6 per cent of Malaysian students in 2005 respectively.⁷

2 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 107.

3 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 107.

4 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 85.

5 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 84.

6 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 108.

7 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 109.

- 6.8 Three Australian universities now have branch campuses in Malaysia. In February 1998, Monash University was invited by the Malaysian Government to establish a campus in Malaysia, the first international institution to receive such an invitation. Monash University Malaysia received its first intake of students in July 1998 and by 2005 the campus had expanded to 2450 students. Curtin University and the Swinburne University of Technology have also established branch campuses in Malaysia.⁸
- 6.9 Many Australian universities have been involved in the growth of private educational facilities in Malaysia, through twinning arrangements, advance standing schemes and programmes to upgrade the qualifications of Malaysian academics. Students are able to undertake the early years of their courses in Malaysia and to complete the latter part of their studies at an Australian campus. Additionally, at least 14 Australian universities have approval to provide full in-country degree programmes with Malaysian partners.⁹
- 6.10 Australian and Malaysian universities also have a large number of university to university links. These links encourage joint research and exchange and facilitate the building of relationships and cultural understanding between students and academics from both countries.¹⁰

Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee

- 6.11 The AVCC plays a role in Malaysian educational capacity building. Recently, the AVCC and the Malaysian Vice-Chancellor's Committee (MVCC) undertook to strengthen Australia-Malaysian links through its Malaysian University Lecturer Upgrade Programme. According to the AVCC, the project aimed to strengthen university to university links; enhance perceptions of Australian universities; and foster research networks and cooperation and encourage bilateral exchange of academic and cultural perspective.¹¹
- 6.12 In July 2006, the AVCC hosted a two day Australia-Malaysia Vice-Chancellors' meeting in Sydney. This meeting was part of the DEST operated Regional Links Programme which aims to maintain and extend Australia's bilateral, regional and multilateral education and

8 DFAT, *Submission No. 11*, p. 80.

9 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 85.

10 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 85.

11 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 86.

training activities, and further develop the international dimension of Australia's education and training industry.¹²

- 6.13 The meeting involved 10 Malaysian universities and 14 Malaysian delegates, and 13 Australian Vice-Chancellors or their representatives. The AVCC's submission stated that:

... the representation from both Australia and Malaysia at the meeting is an indication of the importance of these meetings and the enthusiasm for collaboration and communication in and between universities in both countries.¹³

- 6.14 Issues discussed at the meeting included staff and student mobility, credit transfer and the recognition of qualifications. Delegates resolved to meet again in Kuala Lumpur to sign an MoU aimed at establishing and supporting research collaboration and opportunities for staff and student mobility between universities in both countries.
- 6.15 The AVCC and the MVCC resolved to lobby government through their respective Minister for Education to establish a fund similar to those established with China and India to facilitate research collaboration and postgraduate exchange.¹⁴

Scholarships

- 6.16 The *Endeavour Programme* is a scholarship programme which forms part of the Australian Government's \$1.4 billion *Australia Scholarships* initiative. It aims to bring high achieving students, researchers and professionals from the Asia-Pacific region, to Australia to undertake short or long term study, research and professional development in a range of disciplines. The *Endeavour Programme* includes postgraduate scholarships, research fellowships, student exchanges and scholarships aimed at professionals working in academia, government, business and in the community.¹⁵
- 6.17 Malaysians are eligible for the following awards:
- *Endeavour Asia Awards* (postgraduate research and study)
 - *Endeavour Malaysia Awards* (postgraduate research and study)
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12 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 86.

13 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 86.

14 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 86.

15 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 110.

- *Endeavour Malaysia Research Fellowships* (postgraduate and postdoctoral research)
 - *Endeavour Australia Cheung Kong Awards* (postgraduate and postdoctoral research)
 - *Endeavour Postgraduate Awards* (postgraduate study)
 - *Endeavour Research Fellowships* (postgraduate and postdoctoral research)
 - *Endeavour Executive Awards* (professional development)
 - *Endeavour International Postgraduate Research Scholarships* (postgraduate research)
 - *Endeavour Vocational and Technical Education Awards* (diploma and advanced diploma)
- 6.18 In 2006, 45 Malaysians were allocated *Endeavour Malaysia Awards* for postgraduate research and study, and four Australians received *Endeavour Malaysia Awards* to undertake research and study in Malaysia.¹⁶
- 6.19 In July 2005, while visiting the International Islamic University Malaysia, Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer MP, announced the creation of six new *Endeavour Malaysia Awards* for postgraduate studies and four new *Endeavour Malaysia Research Fellowships* for the two-way exchange of students. According to DEST, these scholarships will be offered to scholars of the highest academic standing whose study and research projects will enhance relationships between Australia and Malaysia, and encourage understanding amongst Australians of Islamic culture.¹⁷
- 6.20 DEST told the Committee that many Australian universities provided funding for exchange scholarships at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, in some cases partnering with industry. The Australian Government also undertook partnership with industry, such as the *Endeavour Australia Cheung Kong Awards*.¹⁸
- 6.21 The Awards commenced in 2004/2005 and involved the provision of A\$3.75 million by both the Australian Government and Cheung Kong Group of companies. The awards are split evenly with half being

16 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 110.

17 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 110.

18 Ms Fiona Buffinton, *Transcript 4 December 2006*, p. 21.

available to Australians proceeding to study in Asia and half to Asian scholars studying in Australia. The A\$7.5 million in funding supports the participation of up to 856 undergraduate students in institution-to-institution student exchanges and funds up to 132 postgraduate/post doctoral fellowships.¹⁹

- 6.22 Despite the growth of scholarship support, it still appears that Australian students are reluctant to study abroad in Malaysia. DEST told the Committee that:

People still think of Europe or America when they are going abroad, as opposed to engaging with our near neighbours. Looking at what we can see in terms of our trade relationships and our strategic engagement within the region, I think it is really important to get more Australians to study abroad.²⁰

Malaysia's demand for international education

- 6.23 In 2006, around 40 000 Malaysian students were accepted into public universities, while 37 8000 students failed to secure a position. This shortfall has led to an increase in the demand for private education, in which Australia participates through 'twinning' partnerships for the delivering of qualifications.²¹
- 6.24 The Malaysian Government's *Vision 2020* plan, designed to elevate Malaysia to developed country status by 2020, calls for 40 per cent of the Malaysian population to have tertiary education qualifications by 2020. Given Malaysia's growing population, this will require a dramatic expansion of the public university, private college and vocational sectors in Malaysia.²²
- 6.25 The Ninth Malaysia Plan (Malaysia's five year development plan), released in March 2006, recognised that the majority of public institutions must focus on expanding places and on teaching and learning. Malaysia also wished to develop and recognise outstanding research. Accordingly, the Plan announced that funding would only

19 <http://www.endeavour.dest.gov.au/for_asia_pacific_applicants/endeavour_australia_cheung_kong_awards.htm>, accessed 13 January 2007.

20 Ms Fiona Buffinton, *Transcript 4 December 2006*, p. 17.

21 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 112.

22 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 112.

be given to four institutions for research, and that the number of academics with PhDs would be increased from 38 per cent to 60 per cent across all universities within 5 years. DEST's submission suggested that with only four universities engaging in research, demand may rise for international PhD education, and Australia may benefit from this demand.²³

Barriers to provision of international education

Recognition of qualifications

- 6.26 Both the DEST and AVCC submissions focus on the issue of the recognition of Australian qualifications within Malaysia. There are two processes involved:
- the relevant professional board in Malaysia must recognise the qualification, as without appropriate recognition, students are prevented from working in Malaysia.
 - the Malaysian Public Service Department (JPA) must recognise the qualification. Without this, a student may be unsuitable to apply for some jobs in the public service, but more importantly, they will not be paid at an equivalent level as a person with a recognised qualification.²⁴
- 6.27 Malaysia's recognition of higher education qualifications occurs on a degree-by-degree and institution-by-institution basis. This assessment method reduces the range of degrees that Malaysian students are prepared to take in Australia and results in compliance costs for Australian universities. The AVCC's submission cites Australia's 20 Bachelor of Law degrees, of which the JPA only recognises 14.²⁵
- 6.28 As noted in Chapter 4, the JPA also does not distinguish between Australian Honours Bachelor degrees and the three year bachelor Degree with Honours offered by other foreign universities. The AVCC hoped Malaysia would alter its recognition process to

23 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 112.

24 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 114.

25 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 87.

recognise the extra effort and higher academic results required for an Honours degree in Australia.²⁶

- 6.29 Some progress has recently been made. For instance, Malaysian recognition of Australian universities has been raised to 100 per cent. The process of gaining recognition for individual degrees has been shortened from averaging around two years to six-eight months, and there is now automatic recognition for the Commonwealth Register for Institutions and Courses for Overseas Study list of Australia's social science, humanities and science degrees. Australian Education International is seeking to extend the number of areas for automatic recognition.²⁷
- 6.30 On the other hand, recognition for non-university higher education providers remains unresolved.²⁸

Foreign ownership restrictions

- 6.31 While Australian institutions are among the most active in the development of Malaysian-foreign cooperation education programmes in Malaysia, there are a number of restrictions on their presence in Malaysia.
- 6.32 Foreign providers must have a local partner in order to supply education services in Malaysia, with the local partner being the legal entity. Total foreign ownership of an educational enterprise is currently capped at 49 per cent, and the joint education institution must have at least one Malaysian citizen on its board.²⁹
- 6.33 In Chapter 4, the Committee has identified that the recognition of Australian qualifications and the issue of foreign ownership as being issues for discussion in FTA negotiations.

26 AVCC, *Submission No. 12*, p. 87.

27 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 114.

28 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 114.

29 DEST, *Submission No. 14*, p. 115.

Advertising and perceptions of Australian education

- 6.34 The Malaysian Students Council of Australia told the Committee that in Malaysia, 'Australia is not very well established in marketing its education' and that 'Australia is not as established as the UK and the US.'³⁰
- 6.35 The AVCC agreed that Australia's education marketing in Malaysia was deficient when compared with the UK and US. The witness commented that the British Council had a massive budget for marketing on behalf of British universities and Australia could not compete on economic marketing terms, but did so in marketing quality.³¹
- 6.36 The Malaysian Students Organisation of the University of New South Wales suggested that 'most people would prefer the UK over Australia' and that 'Australia is generally seen as a poor man's choice for foreign education.'³²
- 6.37 The AVCC witness disagreed that Australia was seen as a 'poor man's choice', suggesting that, in his experience, Malaysian students viewed study in Australia as 'an opportunity with a very high cost-to-benefit ratio.' He concluded that:
- I would totally disagree with any implication that the quality is lower than that in Britain or in the US—quite the contrary, I would say.³³
- 6.38 DEST refuted the Malaysian Student Organisation's claims by noting that Australia had significantly greater numbers of Malaysian students than either the US or UK, and that the decline in student numbers had been greater for those countries relative to Australia. Regarding Australian education generally, DEST stated that it was Australia's fourth largest export because:
- ... we are perceived as a quality service provider certainly in our medium-to high-end brand of education.³⁴

30 Mr Mohd Saiful Tan, *Transcript 21 November 2006*, p. 4.

31 Professor Roger Dean, *Transcript 4 December 2006*, p. 11.

32 Mr Wai King Yong, *Transcript 21 November 2006*, p. 3.

33 Professor Roger Dean, *Transcript 4 December 2006*, p. 11.

34 Ms Fiona Buffinton, *Transcript 4 December 2006*, pp. 18-19.

Alumni

- 6.39 Dating back to the Colombo Plan, many Malaysian alumni of Australian educational institutions have held influential positions across all levels of Malaysian society. DFAT provided a list of eleven Malaysian Ministers and State Chief Ministers who received their education in Australia. Notable figures included:
- YB Dato' Seri Syed Hamid Bin Syed Jaafar Albar, *Minister of Foreign Affairs*;
 - YB Dato' Mustapa bin Mohamed, *Minister of Higher Education*;
 - YB Dato' Sri Mohd Effendi Norwawi, *Minister in the Prime Minister's Department*; and
 - YB Datuk Dr. Maximus Johnity Ongkili, *Minister in the Prime Minister's Department*.³⁵
- 6.40 DCITA stated that alumni tend to 'have positive views about Australia and Australians' and that 'the personal relationships are a great advantage.' Negotiating with alumni was easier because they 'understand Australian points of view' and tend to speak English well.³⁶
- 6.41 DEST advised the Committee that there had been a 'getting of wisdom' with regards to looking after Malaysian alumni and utilising them as a form of promotion. Whereas previously the importance of alumni networks was downplayed and tools for post-graduation communication, such as the internet, were limited, the value of strong networks was now recognised and efforts were being made to facilitate their formation.³⁷

Committee comment

- 6.42 Education is clearly both a vital platform for the broader bilateral relationship and economically beneficial for Australia. It is important that the education dimension continues to be maintained and reinvigorated. The Committee agrees with Mr Geoffrey Sauer's

35 DFAT, *Submission No. 22*, p. 193.

36 Mr William Scott, *Transcript 16 October 2006*, p. 9.

37 Ms Fiona Buffinton, *Transcript 4 December 2006*, p. 19.

suggestion that the Australian Government, especially through the Australia Malaysia Institute, should support such activities as young leader's programmes, academic exchanges and study-abroad programmes, and that:

... over time, the number of Malaysians with an Australian education background will decline, and for the relationship to be nurtured and sustained, a strategic programme to bring people together from the two countries is required.³⁸

- 6.43 It is also important that universities, business and government continue to encourage Australian students to study in Malaysia, and provide financial or professional support in doing so. Malaysia is a strategically important country for Australia and it is important that interest in and understanding of Malaysian cultures and religions be fostered amongst Australians.
- 6.44 It is important that Malaysian students are not forgotten when they return home, that alumni events are held in Malaysia and the potential marketing value of Malaysian alumni is recognised. In this respect, the Committee cites as an example the Australian National University's extensive alumni programme, which in 2005-06 included a series of alumni events held throughout the Asia Pacific.³⁹

38 Mr Geoffrey Sauer, *Submission No. 3*, p. 15.

39 <<http://info.anu.edu.au/mac/Alumni/Events/Past/index.asp>>, accessed 10 January 2007.

