



Australia Awards

Returning Home Guidebook

Australia Awards
Scholarships



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1. Congratulations

Congratulations on completing your course of study and your Australia Awards Scholarship. It was no doubt demanding, but you rose to the challenge.

1.1 This guidebook

The information contained in this guidebook will assist you to transition to your home country. It contains practical advice on preparing to leave, as well as hints on how to maintain your links with Australia.

You will have a busy schedule towards the end of your scholarship. Receiving your new qualifications, vacating your accommodation, closing your bank account and packing your belongings are just a few things you'll be doing in a very short time.

This booklet also outlines ways the Australian Government and your institution can help support you as you return home, and specifies the things you must complete before you go. Importantly, it reminds you of your obligations, both before you leave and when you arrive home.

As with your arrival, your departure will be much smoother if you stick to a good plan.





1.2 Heading home

The Australia Awards continue a long tradition of international education that has been an important component of the Australian Government's aid program since the 1950s, strengthening our ties with nations in our region and beyond.

You are about to start the next leg of your journey, applying your valuable knowledge and new skills in your home country. Your Australia Awards Scholarship will enable you to drive change and contribute to the economic and social development of your own country. You and your fellow graduates determine the success of the Australia Awards program through your ability to apply what you have learned. Whether you are a scientist, an engineer, a health worker or an economist, you can assist with achieving the development goals of your home country.

You leave as an Australia Awards alumnus—a member of your own national Australia Awards alumni as well as a member of a prestigious international Australia Awards alumni network—with strong links to Australia and a passion for sustainable development.

The friendships you have built in Australia and the expansion of your networks as an alumnus will also help you achieve your goals for reintegration when you get home.

2. Completion of studies

2.1 Departure: your obligations

When do I have to return home by?

In keeping with the Australia Awards contract you signed, you must return home either before your visa expires or within 30 days of your end date, **whichever comes first**. Your two-year exclusion period (refer to section 2.3 of the [Handbook](#)) will commence from the date that you depart Australia. The conditions of the Student Visa Subclass 576 you have been on for the duration of your studies do not permit an extension to attend a formal graduation ceremony in Australia.

What if my spouse is also an Australia Awards Scholarship holder and has not completed his or her studies?

The only exception to returning home outside the timeframes outlined above is if your spouse is also an Australia Awards Scholarship holder and has not completed his or her studies. You may be able to remain in Australia while your spouse finishes studying, but you will need to contact the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to transfer to a Dependant Visa Subclass 576. Should your application for a Dependant Visa Subclass 576 be successful, your two-year exclusion period (refer section 2.3) will commence from the date that you depart Australia, either at the end of your spouse's visa or within 30 days of their end date, whichever comes first.

Please notify your Student Contact Officer as early as possible if you wish to apply for a Dependant Visa Subclass 576, as the Department of Immigration and Border Protection paperwork may take some time to process. Any applications for new visas will have to be at your own expense.



See the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook (section 18.4) for more information.



Your contribution to living expenses will only continue for five days past your Australia Awards Scholarship end date.

2.2 Your Australia Awards Scholarship end date

There are a number of important things you need to do before your scholarship end date. For this reason, it is crucial you know exactly when your end date is. Contact your Student Contact Officer if you are not sure.

For coursework students, your scholarship end date is defined as either the date that your examination results are released (as advised by your institution) or the date that you depart Australia, whichever comes first.

For research students, the end date is defined as either the date of submission of your thesis/research work or the date that you depart Australia, whichever comes first.

For more information about completing your studies, see the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy [Handbook](#) (section 18.1–3).

2.3 The two-year rule

Your Australia Award has equipped you with knowledge and skills to take back to your home country. To apply these effectively and make a positive and lasting impact on the long-term growth and stability in your home country, you are required to remain in your home country for at least two years after you return.

The requirement to return home for two years was part of the Australia Awards Scholarship contract you signed as well as the Student Visa Subclass 576 you have been on for the duration of your studies. The consequence of these requirements not being met includes repayment of the entire cost of your scholarship (including the cost of any supplementary awards you received) if you apply for either:

- permanent residency or
- a visa to remain in, or return to stay long-term in Australia, within two years of completion of your studies or research.



You are required to remain in your country for at least two years after you return.

However, you may return within the first two years for **short visits only** without incurring a debt. A short visit is anything up to three months. Should you wish to visit Australia within the two years for a period longer than three months, you will need to contact the Australia Awards Office for approval. You need to bear in mind however that any time spent in Australia during your two-year period will be added onto the end of that exclusion period.

See the Australia Awards Scholarships Policy Handbook (section 8.7) and the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection website (www.immi.gov.au) for more information.

2.4 Travel costs and arrangements

The Australian Government will assist you with returning home by paying for your economy-class airfare via the shortest route to your home country. However, you are responsible for paying for your travel insurance, the transport of your personal effects and travel for any of your dependants.

Your Student Contact Officer will arrange and pay for your airfare. Please ask your Student Contact Officer to help you work out the most appropriate flight home that makes it possible for you to comply with the 30-day rule.

Please be aware that if you fail to board the flight they arrange, we are obligated to advise the Department of Immigration and Border Protection that you are still in Australia, possibly without a valid visa.

You must see your Student Contact Officer well in advance of your scholarship end date to ensure your travel arrangements enable you to comply with the 30-day rule.





3. Finalising your Australia Award Scholarship

3.1 Graduation and on-campus matters

Your Student Contact Officer will be able to tell you when your academic results will be released. If you are unable to attend your institution's formal graduation ceremony, ask your Student Contact Officer whether your institution offers an alternative graduation ceremony or a special completion ceremony. For confirmation, contact Australia Awards staff in your home country.

If you leave Australia before graduation, ask your Student Contact Officer to send your degree or certificate to you. You can also arrange to collect your academic transcript (record) or ask your Student Contact Officer to mail it to you in your home country. You may request a letter of completion of studies from your institution, which is an official statement that you are eligible to graduate. It is usually available on request after your results are released.

See the checklist on the next page for other things to finalise on campus.

Graduation and Campus checklist:



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| | Return your library books. |
| | Repay any money you owe to the institution, especially any fines or fees as these may prevent you from graduating. |
| | Finalise any paperwork relating to your course completion requirements, including your degree, certificate, academic transcript or letter of completion of studies. |
| | Collect your academic transcript and letter of completion of studies. |
| | Collect your air ticket. |
| | Provide your home country contact details by completing the Australia Awards Alumni Network card attached to this book and pass it to your Student Contact Officer. This will ensure we have your correct contact details in the Australia Awards Alumni Network and you won't miss out on any important alumni information or updates. |
| | Become an active member of an Australia Awards alumni association. Australian embassies or consulates in your home country will be able to help you find an association. |

4. Finalising personal matters



You will have a lot to do just finalising your personal matters before your leave Australia.

4.1 Start early

You will have a lot to do just finalising your personal matters before your leave Australia. Moving out of your accommodation, closing your bank accounts and even completing a tax return may be some of the things you need to address before you depart. We recommend that you begin this process well in advance of your end date as it will be much more difficult to complete these matters from your home country. **Failure to deal with your affairs is not grounds to remain in Australia** beyond the 30 days of your end date.

4.2 Accommodation

If you are renting private accommodation, you have probably signed a lease and paid a bond. Review your lease to check how much notice you have to give your landlord. Usually you need to give at least four weeks notice, but this can be longer depending on your arrangements. You will need to make sure that the property is in the same condition as when you arrived, arrange a time with your landlord or rental agent for an inspection of the property, return your keys and reclaim your bond.

In Australia, laws covering residential tenancy differ between states. You can find this information on the website of the fair trading or consumer affairs departments in your state. The website also explains the responsibilities of tenants, landlords and real estate agents when a tenant vacates a property.

If you are living on campus, check the rules governing vacation of the residential college.



If you are unsure about your obligations as a tenant, contact the student accommodation unit at your institution for information.

4.3 Utilities

You will need to disconnect your electricity, gas, water and phone, as well as cancel your internet service provider. To do this, contact the companies supplying your utilities and give them a forwarding address for the final bill.

4.4 Taxation and superannuation

Contact the Australian Taxation Office (www.ato.gov.au or phone 13 28 61) for information on how to lodge a tax return for any work you may have done while in Australia.

The Australian Taxation Office can also advise you on how to claim superannuation payments deducted from your pay by your employer.

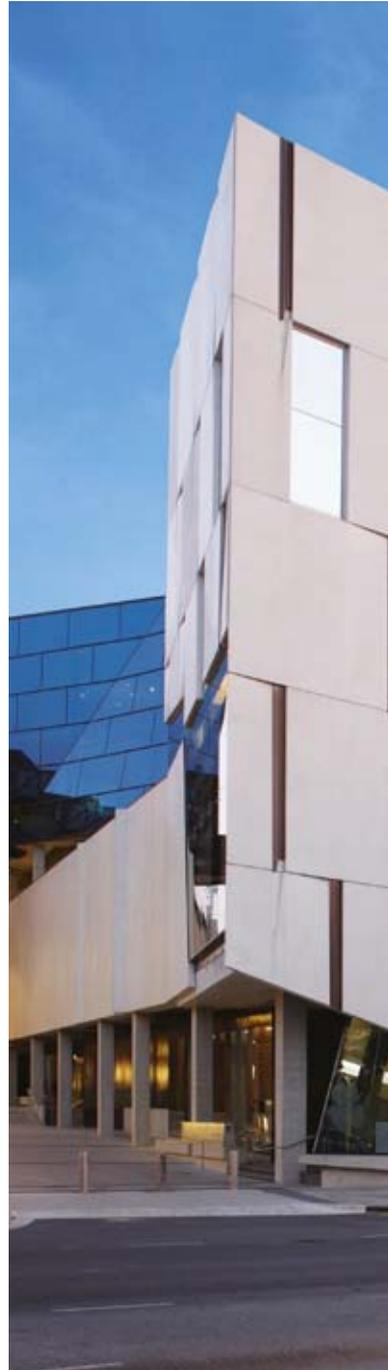
Consult an accountant if you want professional advice on your financial affairs.

4.5 Bank accounts

Contact your bank or financial institution for advice on closing your account. It is important to make sure that all payments (salaries from your employer, final stipend payments, etc.) have been made into your account before you close it.

4.6 Contact your employer at home

During your final semester, contact your employer in your home country to discuss returning to work and the specific tasks you will be undertaking. If you and your employer developed a reintegration plan before you arrived in Australia, you may need to update the agreed work tasks and priorities.





4.7 Other tasks

Request your personal and family medical records from your doctor, your children’s school records, and ask your employer for a reference.

Arrange for Australia Post to redirect your mail through your local post office.

You should also inform your networks including sports clubs and community groups that you will be leaving, and if you wish to stay in touch, give them your contact details.

4.8 Travel light

How did you accumulate so much in such a short time? Check baggage weight restrictions with your airline. Most airlines set a limit of 20 kilograms per person. Contact a freight company to ship items home if you need to, but aim to travel light. Don’t forget that you are responsible for the cost of transporting excess baggage from Australia.

To ensure that you travel as lightly as possible, try to store as much information as possible in digital format, to avoid transporting hardcopies. You could also sell unwanted household items—through your institution’s newspapers, websites such as eBay or Gumtree, placing advertisements on university bulletin boards or by holding a garage sale.

Check customs restrictions on items that can be transported, and ask the freight company for advice on packaging.

Keep a record of items you are shipping home and label boxes clearly.

Personal affairs checklist:



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| | Give notice of your intention to vacate your rental accommodation. |
| | Check the rules for vacating accommodation, especially if you are on campus. |
| | Reclaim your bond (if you paid one). |
| | Arrange to disconnect your electricity, gas, water, phone and internet services. |
| | Lodge your tax return and arrange to reclaim your superannuation payments if you have been working. |
| | Close your bank account. |
| | Contact your employer in your home country. |
| | Request your medical records. |
| | Request your children's school records. |
| | Ask for a reference from your employer(s) if you have worked. |
| | Inform your home country employer and the Australian High Commission/representation in your home country of your arrival date and time. |
| | Check baggage weight restrictions. |
| | Dispose of any goods you will not be taking home. |

5. Back home

5.1 Australia Awards Alumni

When all your hard work has paid off it will be time to celebrate your graduation and depart to make a difference in your homeland. This could be the start of one of the most satisfying chapters in your life. You will have the opportunity to transfer your hard earned knowledge to your home country, pursuing the goal that motivated you to apply for an Australia Award.

Sadness about saying goodbye to friends, colleagues and academics will be eased by the knowledge that you can keep in touch with them when you return home.

Your long-term success and ongoing professional development will benefit from ongoing ties with Australia, as well as engagement with other Australia Award alumni in your country and around the world.



As an Australia Awards alumni you are now part of a prestigious network from around the world driving social and economic development.

5.2 Strengthening the ties

As an Australia Awards alumni you are now part of a prestigious network from around the world driving social and economic development as a result of your Australian education. Your success at home exemplifies the benefits of the Australia Awards program.

The Australian Government is keen to remain in contact with you after you complete your studies. You automatically become a member of the Australia Awards Alumni Network which will help you maintain the important connections you have made with Australia and other Australia Awards recipients. Once you return home, the Australian Government representation in your country will provide ongoing support to you through the Network which offers professional development opportunities and networking events.

There are a number of ways you can ensure you remain connected to Australia and other alumni after you return home.

You can complete the card attached to this book and hand it to your Student Contact Officer or mail it to:

Australia Awards Alumni Manager

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GPO Box 887
Canberra ACT 2601

By ensuring that we have your correct contact details you won't miss out on information and opportunities through our Alumni Network.

Make sure you also contact Australia Awards staff in your home country on your return to join the local alumni network in your country. There are many active alumni associations around the world for Australia Awards alumni to connect with not only each other, but also with other alumni from Australian institutions in your country. If there is no association in your country, or near your home, you might consider establishing one yourself!

When you get home, keep in touch with Australia Awards staff, participate in our evaluation and tracer studies and let us know your achievements and the work you are doing. Feedback on your experience in Australia and your reintegration into the workforce helps us to improve the Australia Awards.

Think about mentoring people aspiring to take up an Australia Awards Scholarship. For example, through the Australia Awards Alumni Network, find out if it's possible for you to help with the pre-departure briefing for future awardees.

Become an active member of your institution's alumni association. Some institutions have active chapters of alumni associations in Australia's partner countries as well.



Feedback on your experience in Australia and your reintegration into the workforce helps us to improve the Australia Awards.

Back home:

Keep in touch with the Australia Awards staff at home.

Join the local Australia Awards alumni network.

Mentor people aspiring to take up an Australia Awards Scholarship.

Keep in touch with other Australia Awards recipients.

Alumni connects Solomon Islanders

Former Australia Awardee and now Prime Minister of Solomon Islands, Gordon Darcy Lilo, launched the Solomon Islands–Australia Alumni Network in Honiara, in 2012.

At the network launch, the Prime Minister expressed how much he valued the opportunity to study in Australia, and his hope that the alumni would help to keep Solomon Islanders connected with each other and Australia.

“With so many Solomon Islanders studying in Australia, the Alumni network is a practical and useful way for keeping in touch and offer ongoing development opportunities,” Mr Darcy Lilo said.

DFAT education team at the launch of the Solomon Islands–Australia Alumni Network in Honiara. L–R: Shalom Akao Waita, Collin Potakana, Sarah Nihopara, Australian High Commissioner Matt Anderson, Solomon Islands Prime Minister Gordon Darcy Lilo, Juliette Brassington, Alice Fakarii, Marlon Butler, Joanne Pita Aihunu.



6. Reverse culture shock

6.1 Adjusting

Many overseas students are hit by reverse culture shock when they get home. They experience emotional turmoil similar to when they arrived in Australia.

Reverse culture shock is caused by many factorsⁱ. You may have idealised your home country during your absence and/or it may have changed socially, politically and economically while you were away. You may not be as close to your family and friends as when you left, and cultural norms in your home country might now seem unfamiliar. These are just some factors in reverse culture shockⁱⁱ.

You may experience symptoms of reverse culture shock, including unexplained tiredness, disorientation, declining self-esteem, feelings of pressure to conform to your home environment, and unwillingness or fear to resume home and work responsibilities. You might have trouble adjusting to a daily work routine and to 'rigid or stereotyped male/female roles', and technology differences may be disorientatingⁱ.

You may also have difficulty adjusting from Australia's culture that encourages "individualism" to your own culture which may focus more on a "collective" family centre. Your speech, manner and ways might be misinterpreted and at work you may face a tough job market, and/or resistance to change.

Ways to manage reverse culture shock, include catching up on developments at home and reconnecting with family and friends before you leave Australia. More ideas for preventing reverse culture shock are listed belowⁱⁱⁱ:



Ways to manage reverse culture shock, include catching up on developments at home and reconnecting with family and friends before you leave Australia.

ⁱ Christine Hogan, *Teaching and Learning Within and Across Disciplines* (<http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf1996/hoganch.html>).

ⁱⁱ Martha Denney, *Going Home A Workbook—A Guide to Professional Integration*, National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, Washington DC, 1986.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lawrence M Brammer & Philip J Abrego, 'Intervention strategies for coping with transitions', *The Counselling Psychologist*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1981, pp. 19–36

Avoiding Reverse Culture Shock:



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| | Before leaving Australia, catch up on the political scene back home. |
| | Get an update from your employer and/or the job market. |
| | Plan your departure in order to ease stress. |
| | When you get home, assess changes in yourself. |
| | Get support from others, including family and friends. |
| | Be flexible about your work. |
| | Give yourself time to readjust. |

Australia Awards Alumni, Advancing the future of Liberia

Zotawon D. Titus is a talented young professional with admirable drive to advance the future of his home country, post-conflict Liberia. Through his Australia Awards Scholarship, he obtained a Master's degree in Public Policy from Flinders University in 2012.

On a trip back to Liberia, midway through his studies in Australia, Titus was able to apply his new skills and knowledge gained in Australia. Titus was asked to prepare a National Postal Policy by his employer (the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications).

Upon returning to Liberia, Titus was appointed Deputy Minister of Technical Services. He is currently working with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that telecommunications services are provided to areas that do not have access to adequate services.

Titus is also actively involved in efforts to establish an Australia Awards Alumni Association in Liberia.



“Acquiring a Master’s degree has enhanced my capacity to contribute to public sector reform in Liberia. I have acquired new insights, tools in policy making and other such values through the Public Policy program under the Australia Awards Scholarship, which has prepared me to contribute more meaningfully to national development through public sector reform programs.”

Zotawaon Titus



Australia Awards Alumni

Stay in touch by letting us know your contact details—hand this form to your SCO before you depart

First name:

Last name:

Date of birth

Home address :

Mobile Number:

Email:

Alternate Email:

Employers name and details (if known):

If you are home and wish to update your details please email updated details to scholarships@dfat.gov.au



Australia Awards



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