

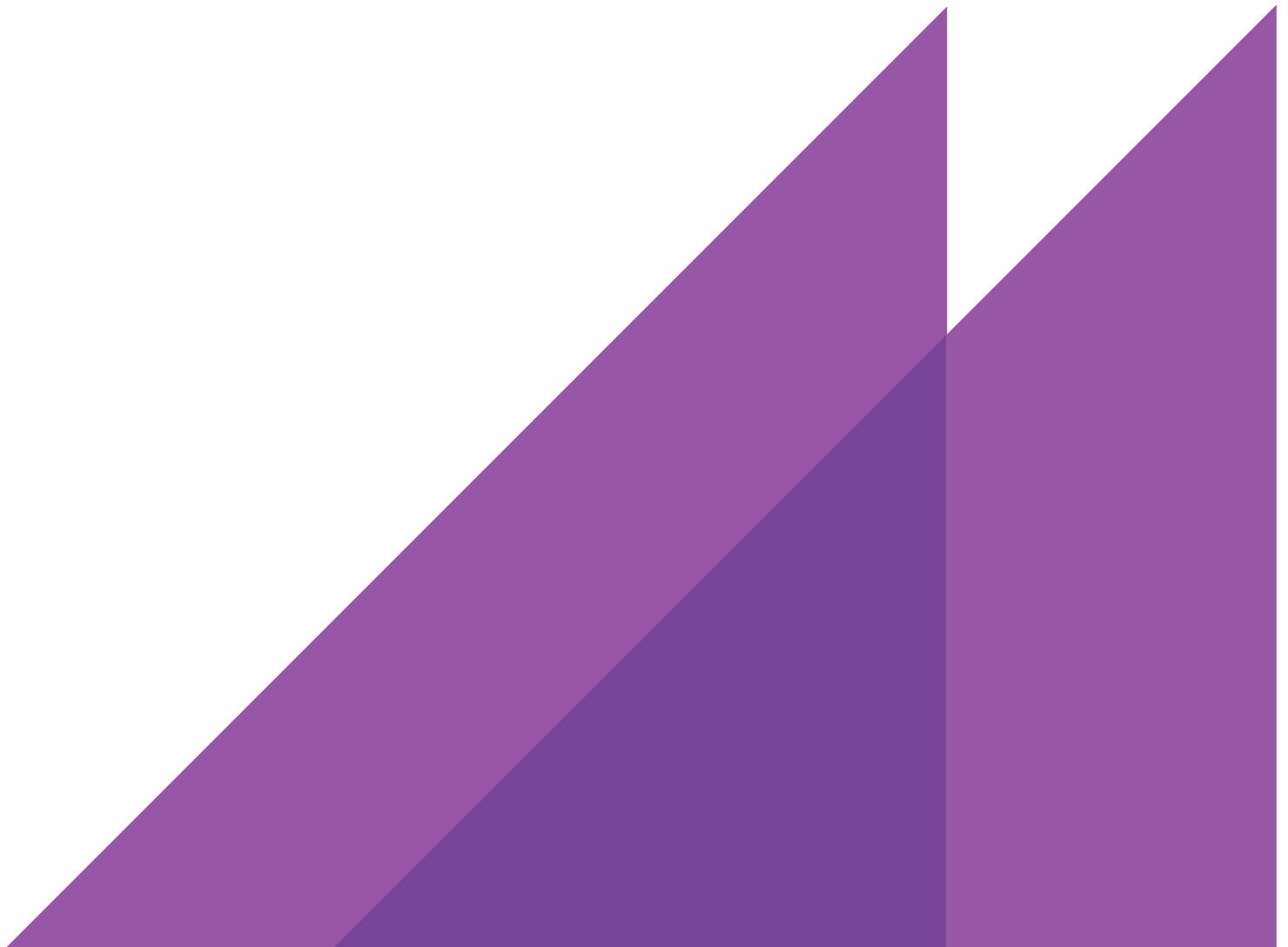
REPORT TO
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING &
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

1 SEPTEMBER 2017

EVALUATION OF THE NEW COLOMBO PLAN



SCHOLARSHIP AND MOBILITY PILOT
PROGRAMS
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT





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C O N T E N T S

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY I

1

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
1.1 Context and scope	1
1.2 Evaluating NCP	1
1.3 Report structure	4

2

<i>Did the pilots meet their operational objectives?</i>	<i>5</i>
2.1 Operational objective 1—expansion	5
2.2 Operational objective 2—Mobility program	6
2.3 Operational objective 3—internships and mentorships	7
2.4 Operational objective 4—bilateral relations	8
2.5 Operational objective 5—the alumni community	9
2.6 Operational objective 6—evaluation and future development	10

3

<i>Did the pilots meet their strategic objectives?</i>	<i>12</i>
3.1 Strategic objective 1	12
3.2 Strategic objective 2	13
3.3 Strategic objective 3	14

4

<i>Observations and concluding remarks</i>	<i>16</i>
4.1 The NCP objectives require sustained and long term investment	16
4.2 Appropriate evaluation helps builds trust and confidence	16
4.3 Measuring outcomes requires stronger monitoring	17
4.4 Continue to engage the alumni	18
4.5 Concluding remarks	18

A

<i>Evaluation questions</i>	<i>A-1</i>
A.1 Stage 1 evaluation questions	A-1
A.2 Stage 2 evaluation questions	A-1
A.3 Stage 3 evaluation questions	A-2

B

<i>Summary of findings</i>	<i>B-1</i>
B.1 Stage 1 findings	B-1
B.2 Stage 2 findings	B-3
B.3 Stage 3 findings	B-6

C

<i>Better practice guide: monitoring and evaluation</i>	<i>C-1</i>
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C O N T E N T S

TABLES

TABLE 1.1	SUMMARY OF EVALUTION ACTIVITIES APPLIED TO STAGES 1—3	3
TABLE 2.1	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 1	5
TABLE 2.2	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 2	7
TABLE 2.3	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 3	8
TABLE 2.4	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 4	9
TABLE 2.5	EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 5	10
TABLE 3.1	SNAPSHOT OF ALUMNI SURVEY RESULTS	12
TABLE 3.2	AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ABROAD BY COUNTRY (ALL LEVELS)	14
TABLE 3.3	AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MOBILITY— BY TYPE (ALL LEVELS)	14



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Government launched the New Colombo Plan (NCP) in December 2013 with the aim of strengthening individual and institutional relationships between Australia and the Indo-Pacific region, and increasing the number of 'Asia-ready' Australian graduates. Now in its fifth year, the NCP has supported approximately 17,500 Australian undergraduate students to live, study and work in over 40 countries around the Indo-Pacific region.

This report consolidates the findings from the evaluation and assesses them against the operational and strategic objectives set for the NCP's pilot phase. The report finalises a multi-year evaluation aimed at providing Government with early and continuous feedback about the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of NCP's activities, outputs and outcomes/impacts.

The evaluation commenced in February 2014 and has followed the journey of students, Australian universities and host location partners from application (Stage 1), through in-country experience (Stage 2) and post-placement engagement (Stage 3). Differences in the experiences of participants of the Mobility Pilot Program (Mobility) and the Scholarship Pilot Program (Scholarship) have been highlighted where possible and useful.

The overall findings of the evaluation are that:

- The pilots were successful in meeting all six of the operational objectives of the NCP's pilot phase. Some shortcomings were identified during consultations with universities in relation to objectives 2 and 3 which concerned the delivery of innovative mobility opportunities, and internships/mentorships for NCP participants. The consultation outcomes suggested that some Australian universities lacked the institutional capacity and regional relationships to facilitate these experiences across all faculties and academic disciplines involved with NCP. However as the NCP matured and universities become more comfortable with the NCP's requirements, universities have over time reported improved capacity to deliver programs that are new to a broader range of faculties. Universities have also gradually improved their ability to support student internship/mentorship opportunities in the region, and this aspect of the program is expected to continue to evolve.
- The pilots are positively tracking towards their strategic objectives. The evaluation has found that participants have gained a cultural and professional appreciation of the Indo Pacific region, and that interpersonal and institutional relationships have been strengthened. For example, survey results from Stage 2 indicate that 85 per cent of Mobility students and 96 per cent of Scholarship students strongly agree or agreed that they had gained a cultural and professional appreciation of the Indo Pacific region from participation in NCP. Furthermore, consultation results show that short term periods of work and/or study in the Indo Pacific region is an increasingly sought after experience for Australian students, as they better meet the personal circumstances of Mobility students who hold employment and have family commitments.
- The NCP is also well-regarded by institutional stakeholders in Australia and the region, and has established a solid foundation on which to continue to expand. Outbound mobility is now a part of the university sector's strategic planning framework, and mobility is now reflected in a range of

performance metrics/indicators that did not exist prior to NCP. NCP also allows universities to pursue relationships with a range of existing and new institutions which align with their strategic plans and deliver sustained benefit.

This report concludes with four general observations about the NCP and its impact on stakeholders since its inception.

1. Universities are keen to support student participation and increase institutional connections in the region. However, the capacity of universities to deliver NCP's objectives has taken time to mature and will continue to improve over time.
2. Government's decision to embed early and ongoing evaluation into the pilot phase of the NCP has improved the administration of the program and fostered trust and confidence with institutional stakeholders. This good-will is important to both maintaining and attracting institutional and student participation.
3. To effectively assess the future impact of the NCP on student participants and bi-lateral relationships across the education and business sectors, Government needs to put in place a strong monitoring and evaluation framework.
4. Opportunities for NCP participants past and future, including universities and businesses, to engage with each other online and through social media is a well targeted development. For online channels to support the NCPs broader goals, more intensive input from participants may be needed and should be encouraged.

Overall the results of the NCP evaluation reflect very positively on the Australian Government, Australian universities, students and host location partners which participate in the Plan. It is assessed that NCP is well-positioned for future growth and expansion.

While the short term benefits of the NCP were clearly evidenced throughout evaluation, it is still too early to be able to report on the longer term impacts for the students and institutions. In being able to report on this in the future, a potential limitation is that there is little evidence of structured evaluation programs in place, within the home universities or elsewhere, to monitor and track the subsequent outcomes for NCP Scholars and Mobility grant alumni, or the most and host institutions. What tracking is being done varies widely by university in terms of its extent and capability.

Also varied was the awareness and experience of the NCP and its branding amongst the student alumni consulted. In the case of Mobility grants students, a number were introduced to their overseas placement as a mandatory component of their subject and were only partially of the role that NCP had played.

Consideration should therefore be given to embedding stronger branding and outcome evaluation and reporting framework as part of the NCP funding provided to universities. While there was widespread in principle support amongst university staff for stronger assessment of impacts, it was apparent that substantial progress in this area would be unlikely without the stimulus of reporting to a consistent framework.



1.1 Context and scope

The NCP evaluation and the Government's openness to stakeholder feedback have shaped the design and rollout of the New Colombo Plan (NCP)—from its early implementation until now. The evaluation has followed the journey of students, Australian universities and host location partners from application (Stage 1), through in-country experience (Stage 2) and post-NCP engagement (Stage 3). This final evaluation report brings together the insights and learnings from the entire evaluation (i.e. stages 1—3) and considers these findings against the operational and strategic objectives of the Program, drawing out differences between the Mobility and Scholarship pilot programs wherever appropriate.

Owing to the long time frame, and the incremental expansion and evolution of NCP over this time, the report also provides insights beyond the scope of the original pilots that may be useful for the ongoing delivery of the NCP. Looking to the future, it concludes with observations about the capability of universities, the good-will generated by government's evolution of the NCP, and considerations for on-going evaluation in the post-pilot phase.

1.2 Evaluating NCP

1.2.1 Rationale underpinning the NCP evaluation

Evaluation provides assurance to NCP's stakeholders that the Mobility and Scholarship programs are delivering positive effects, that performance is being tracked, and that learnings from implementation activities are informing future decision making and program design. For both the Department of Education and Training (Education) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which are jointly responsible NCP's delivery, evaluation is an essential part of policy development and program management that is best incorporated up-front into the design of programs. In short, evaluation can help to support:

- Evidence based policy development—by providing evidence that can be used to inform priority setting, policy development and the more efficient allocation of resources by Education and DFAT.
- Public accountability—by providing evidence which shows that the NCP is accountable and transparent, and the risks associated with programs are being effectively managed.
- Learning—by providing evidence which can inform design and delivery into the future.
- Performance reporting—by providing a process that allows a balanced assessment of progress against the strategic and operational objectives of NCP.¹

¹ DIS (2015), Evaluation Strategy 2015-2019', <http://www.industry.gov.au/Office-of-the-Chief-Economist/Publications/Documents/Evaluation-Strategy.pdf>

Additionally, evaluation should occur throughout the program's implementation. Best practice program evaluation ensures that the NCP is evaluation ready, and that the methodologies and tools are in place to deliver meaningful evaluation outcomes when they are required by Ministers and government.

1.2.2 Evaluation approach and questions

While the rationale for evaluating NCP from its outset is clear, selecting the right methodology for evaluation is much more situationally dependent. For the NCP, an evaluation approach based on best practice principles (as recognised by a number of authoritative sources and reference materials²) was considered to meet the needs of the pilot programs, as well as the expectations of external stakeholders about evaluation outcomes.

Drawing on a range of best practice guidance documents, a program logic evaluation model was developed to consider all aspects of program delivery and consider the causal linkages between NCP's inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. The program logic viewed the NCP through the lens of the student journey, broken into three distinct phases:

- **Stage 1** focused on the nomination/application processes for Scholarship and Mobility used by Government and universities for 2014. In order to provide Government with early and continuous feedback, this stage involved an Interim Report (May 2013) and a Final Report (September 2014).
- **Stage 2** focused on the experience of students and universities participating in the program and discussed the in-county experience in terms of successes, challenges and areas of improvement. The Stage 2 evaluation report was delivered in April 2016.
- **Stage 3** focused on the outcomes and impact for students and universities in Australia and the region, and discussed the design elements and administration arrangements of the NCP. The Stage 3 Report was delivered in June 2017.

The overarching evaluation methodology was supported by a range of evaluation questions which were aligned with the broader principles of the 'logic model' and the particular details associated with the pilot programs' objectives.

The evaluation considered the themes of effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the pilots shaped the analysis undertaken throughout stages 1—3. In particular, these themes were used to consider:

1. How *effective* have the activities undertaken during the application and nomination process been in achieving the NCP desired outputs and the pilot programs operational objectives?
2. Whether the activities have used the pilot program's resources and inputs *efficiently* in producing the program outputs.
3. How *appropriate* the design of the pilot programs and their operational objectives has been in meeting the NCP operational and strategic objectives.

Specific evaluation questions were also developed for each stage of the evaluation. These questions were derived from the pilot program objectives and tailored to suit the individual characteristics of the Mobility and Scholarship pilots where necessary. A list of the evaluation questions addressed across each of the three evaluation stages are listed in Appendix A.

Evaluation tools and activities

At the commencement of each stage, ACIL Allen in consultation with Education and DFAT identified the most appropriate evaluation tools to be applied. The evaluation tools chosen were both quantitative and qualitative in nature and were selected to ensure that data collected from each tool could be triangulated and balanced against each other. The tools used included paper based and online survey instruments, face-to-face and telephone consultations, workshops and focus groups and statistical and program data analysis.

² See for example, The NSW Treasury's Centre for Program Evaluation methods and tool kits, The Australasian Evaluation Society's guidance and publications; Resources available via Betterevaluation.org; The WA Government's Program Evaluation tools and templates; The Department of Finance's Program Evaluation Guidelines; Coordination Committee on Innovation's Best Practice Guide to Evaluation of Science and Innovation Initiatives—Department of Industry and Science.

Also considered was the burden and impact that evaluation activities can have on stakeholders. Every effort was undertaken to ensure that evaluation fatigue amongst stakeholder groups (over the life of a long term evaluation) did not occur, and that the quality of data collected from stakeholders was not compromised.

Table 1.1 lists the evaluation tool and activities that were used at each evaluation stage. The table also provides information about the response rates and level of consultation undertaken for the evaluation.

TABLE 1.1 SUMMARY OF EVALUTION ACTIVITIES APPLIED TO STAGES 1—3

Activity	Details and participation rates
Stage 1	
Paper based survey of NCP Contact Officers who attended a national mobility conference (in Adelaide during March 2014)	32 responses (approx. 32% response rate)
Online survey of NCP Contact Officers in universities	37 responses (approx. 84% response rate)
Survey of Scholarship pilot students	36 responses (approx. 90% response rate)
Consultations with NCP Contact Officers	26 universities
Consultations with a sample of interview panellists	11 panellists (approx. 70% of panellists consulted)
Analysis of program data—including de-identified applications for the Mobility and Scholarship programs	N/A
Analysis of internal and external program guidelines and guidance material	N/A
Consideration of internal systems and reporting templates etc	N/A
Stage 2	
Discussions with DFAT and Education	Numerous
Survey of Scholarship students	23 responses (approx. 70% of students responded)
Survey of Mobility students	357 responses (35% of students responded)
Survey of host locations organisations	41 (Mobility) 27 (Scholarship) (approx. 22% of Mobility and 38% of Scholarship organisations responded)
Consultation with host location contact officers	8 consultations
A focus group with a selection of mobility students	20 students
Stage 3	
Consultations with Australian universities	23 universities (approx. 52% of universities consulted)
Consultations with host organisations	10 approached (30% response rate via email correspondence)
On-campus student workshops	Workshops at 2 universities
Analysis of student completion reports	35 reports reviewed (all reports reviewed)
Analysis of DFAT's alumni survey	197 responses (approx. 16% response rate)

SOURCE: ACIL ALLEN CONSULTING, 2017

1.2.3 Findings of the evaluation

The findings of evaluation stage are provided in Appendix B. These findings are used to inform ACIL Allen's assessment of NCP against its pilot phase objectives. They also inform the report's final observations and remarks.

1.3 Report structure

The remaining chapters of this report are as follows:

- *Chapter 2* maps the findings from each of the three evaluation reports against the six operational objectives of the pilot program. This chapter concludes by isolating the design and administration issues that remain outstanding and require the department's further consideration.
- *Chapter 3* assesses the evaluation outcomes against the three strategic objectives. Recognising the limitations of this formative evaluation in commenting on the long term impact of the NCP, this discussion is supplemented by evidence from other sources, such as the Research Snapshots of the Department of Education and the recent work by the Australian Council of Learned Academies about Australia's engagement with Asia.
- *Chapter 4* provides observations about the NCP that may assist in future planning, particularly in relation to evaluation activities.



This chapter considers the findings from each evaluation stage against the operational objectives of the NCP. It is clear that the pilots have met (or are successfully tracking towards) the NCP's operational objectives. These observations (and the evidence to support them) are detailed below.

2.1 Operational objective 1—expansion

The pilot programs' first operational objective is focused on the NCP's expansion, as shown below:

Select and support approximately 40 Scholarship and 700 Mobility grants that meet the NCP objectives for Australian university students to study across the four pilot destination of HK SAR, Indonesia, Japan and Singapore.

The NCP pilot has met and exceeded this objective. Between 2014 and 2018 the NCP has expanded to approximately 40 host locations, and has provided opportunities to approximately 17,500 undergraduates.

This growth speaks to the pilot's success in developing, rolling out and improving the administrative arrangements behind the NCP, as well as fostering relationships with program stakeholders in Australia and the region such that they continue to support and engage with the program.

The evidence to support ACIL Allen's assessment against operational objective 1 is provided in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1 EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 1

Evaluation stage	Evidence to support assessment
Stage 1—nomination and application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 40 Scholarships awarded for the 2014 round – 1,300 students received Mobility grant funding for the 2014 round – NCP students sent to 4 host locations for the 2014 round
Stage 2—the in-country experience	<p>For the 2015 round:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 69 Scholarships awarded – 3,100 students received Mobility grant funding <p>For the 2016 round:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 100 Scholarships awarded – 5,450 students received Mobility grant funding – 38 host locations eligible for the 2015-16 rounds

Evaluation stage	Evidence to support assessment
Stage 3—post-NPC experiences	For the 2017 round <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 105 Scholarships awarded – 7,400 students received Mobility grant funding – For the 2018 round: – 120-150 Scholarships awarded (estimate) – 7,400 students received Mobility grant funding (estimate) – 40 host locations eligible for the 2017-18 rounds
<small>Note: Nominations and applications for the 2018 round are being considered at the time of writing this report. SOURCE: FINAL EVALUATION REPORT AND WWW.DFAT.GOV.AU</small>	

2.2 Operational objective 2—Mobility program

The pilot programs' second operational objective is focused on the Mobility program, as shown below:

Identify, support and promote innovative Mobility programs that explore new ideas in engaging and providing opportunities for Australian undergraduate grant recipients in the Indo Pacific, with the capacity to assist in scaling up to meet the NCP objectives

When the NCP was first launched, universities experienced difficulties in identifying and supporting innovative Mobility projects. Many consulted did not have a track record in developing Indo-Pacific focused Mobility projects for undergraduate students at that time. The Stage 1 evaluation report noted that for many universities it can take between 12 months and two years to establish a Mobility project that is new or innovative, and at the same time meets the requirements of host locations, home university accreditation panels, and professional accreditation bodies. Further, some universities reported that there are significant costs in changing established projects with partner organisations and that these cannot be recouped through student fees or other support funding.

Despite the difficulties in developing new or innovative Mobility projects, the Stages 2 and 3 reports suggested that the Mobility program had helped students to increase their knowledge of the host locations and develop professional opportunities. The Stage 2 evaluation found that Mobility students particularly valued off-campus activities like field trips, but that language barriers were a challenge. On return to Australia, Mobility students reported high levels of satisfaction with their experience, noting in particular that they gained cross-cultural skills and confidence to engage in the region. Furthermore, it had impacted on their career choices and positively contributed to their career prospects.

The Stage 3 report found that the NCP has been a catalyst for outbound mobility initiatives in universities and that NCP funding was helping universities to achieve their mobility objectives. It demonstrated that Mobility is now embedded in the strategic planning architecture of many universities consulted for the evaluation. Additional innovation may well flow from these expanded opportunities, however it is difficult to anticipate when that might be.

While the Mobility program's administration has improved over time, particularly the pre-departure support and the quality of the Guidelines provided to stakeholders, in order to successfully scale-up there are some residual issues for consideration. These include the functionality of the online management system, the usefulness of Departmental feedback on unsuccessful applications, and the restrictions on the age of applicants having a negative discriminatory effect on some otherwise high quality candidates.

The evidence to support ACIL Allen's assessment against operational objective 2 is provided in Table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2 EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 2

Evaluation stage	Evidence to support assessment
Stage 1—nomination and application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 2.1.1 of the Stage 1 report identified that the short timeframe for submitting applications did not provide the universities with the lead time necessary to develop new or innovative mobility programs. The report also identified that many faculty members and academics were unaware of NCP and its requirements during Tranche 1 of the Stage 1 application round – Chapter 5.2 of the Stage 1 report identified that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – support and guidance provided by Government during application window was appropriate – the flexible funding model used for the Mobility program by Government was well-received by the universities consulted – innovation was not yet wide-spread, most used existing pathways; innovation takes time, and sometime involves costs – publicity material did not support faculty level engagement; internal university processes need development; students require feedback on applications – Chapter 2.3 of the Stage 1 report identified a variety of changes were made to improve the design/processing of the Mobility program
Stage 2—the in-country experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 2 of the Stage 2 report identified that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – most Mobility students improved their knowledge of their host location and are more 'Asia-capable' – Mobility students most valued off-campus events such as field visits, cultural events and meeting local students – language barriers were the biggest challenge; participation in language and cultural training was very helpful – most Mobility students were satisfied with the administration of their project by their home university – opportunities for improvement include travel, visa and accommodation arrangements, and communication of Mobility program goals by home universities – the continued expansion of eligible countries improves opportunities for students to participate in a range of NCP experiences (such as different study options and internships/mentorships)
Stage 3—post-NCP experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 4 of the Stage 3 report identifies that through participation in NCP Mobility students gain knowledge of host location, cross cultural skills and confidence to engage in the region that may not have otherwise been gained

SOURCE: FINAL EVALUATION REPORTS

2.3 Operational objective 3—internships and mentorships

The pilot programs' third operational objective is focused on the internship and mentorship components of NCP, as shown below:

Promote and support initiatives that explore the identification of internships/mentorships for grant recipients at the pilot destinations and provide a range of models and best practice for other destinations.

Internships and mentorships are important to the realisation of the NCP's strategic goals. They encourage professional skills development, professional networking and long-term relationships.

Throughout the evaluation, universities reported difficulty identifying internships and mentorships that faculties could take forward in applications. They cited lack of dedicated processes, funding, guidance and support as the key barriers confronting participation in this aspect of NCP. This is because organising internships and mentorships for students are not traditionally core functions of faculties, and building institutional systems to support internships and mentorships remained a recurring challenge. In the Stage 2 evaluation, student participants reported that arranging an internship/mentorship was one of the most significant challenges of the NCP.

Nevertheless, on returning to Australia, those Mobility students and Scholars who undertook an internship/mentorship reported high levels of satisfaction with the experience. Overall, students indicated that they gained a greater knowledge and understanding of their host location, and personal connections that have helped their career.

Recognising the challenges for universities to secure internship opportunities, the Government has undertaken a number of outreach initiatives to enhance the opportunities that may be available directly from the private sector. In mid-2015 the Private Sector Engagement Unit was established within the Secretariat to focus on this work. Soon followed the launch of initiatives to encourage business engagement—the Internships and Mentorship Network, the Mobility Partners Program, and the appointment of Business Champions—are examples. By the end of June 2016, 203 private sector organisations had registered opportunities on the portal. In the 2016 Mobility Program, around 75 per cent of funded projects involved an internship, practicum or other work-based placement.

The Government describes ongoing support from business as crucial to expanding work-based learning opportunities offered by the NCP and assisting Australian graduates to become more Asia-capable employees. Early indicators suggest that this approach is generating opportunities that provide Australian students with the skills, experience and networks necessary to engage professionally with the region and capitalise on Asian growth.

The evidence to support ACIL Allen’s assessment against operational objective 3 is provided in Table 2.3.

TABLE 2.3 EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN’S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 3

Evaluation stage	Evidence to support assessment
Stage 1—nomination and application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Stage 1 report concluded that many universities found it difficult to identify options for applications due to a lack of capability, inadequate processes and guidelines within the timeframe
Stage 2—the in-country experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 2 of the Stage 2 report identified the difficulties that Mobility students and Scholars experienced in arranging internship/mentorship due to understanding local processes and building local networks – Chapter 3 of the Stage 2 report highlighted that many Mobility students surveyed had ‘temporary stay’ visa issues which prevented them from working while in-country and thus from taking an internship opportunity in some host locations. If a two semester stay was required for the internship then a ‘social cultural’ visa could be obtained but this involved leaving (and returning to) the host country – Chapter 4 of the Stage 2 report provided some feedback from case managers suggesting that internships/mentorships have been an underutilised aspect of the program, but had great potential benefit and that NCP should harness the network being generated by internships/mentorships
Stage 3—post-NPC experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 2 of the Stage 3 report identified that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NCP contact officers within Australian universities believe the funding incentive provided to Mobility students is insufficient to encourage more students to undertake an internship or mentorship opportunity while in-country – university faculty level relationships, while steadily improving have still not matured to a level that would facilitate better leverage of relationships to secure more internship and mentorship opportunities for students – universities do not have access to the Government’s internship portal, and are thus impeded in their ability to help students find internships and mentorships – third party provider fees reduce financial incentive for students to undertake an internship – Chapter 4 of the Stage 3 report provided evidence from students to suggest NCP had a positive impact on the cross cultural, professional development and networking skills of those students who participate in the Plan

SOURCE: FINAL EVALUATION REPORTS

2.4 Operational objective 4—bilateral relations

The pilot programs’ fourth operational objective is focused on the bilateral relationships facilitated by NCP, as shown below:

Establish bilateral support for the Program in pilot destinations that facilitates pilot phase study and internship arrangements and supports engagement with the NCP by the wider Indo-Pacific region

Bilateral support for the NCP relies on a number of factors. Support is dependent on the ability of Australian universities to fostering new relationships and leveraging existing relationships with host universities as well as the ease with which universities can engage in the NCP and the alignment between NCP and the institutional educational objectives of universities.

Although the number and nature of new relationships formed as a direct result of the NCP were not quantified in the evaluation, the ongoing expansion of the NCP (together with evidence from Australian

universities annual reports and strategic plans, as well as feedback from stakeholders during consultations) indicates that enhanced connections with institutions across the region is being achieved, and is a growing priority. In the Stage 3 evaluation it was noted that the NCP provides a platform and a source of ongoing funding to foster the relationships that universities want to pursue.

Host universities reported high levels of satisfaction with the NCP, noting that it helped them to build relationships with Australian universities and Australia generally. Greater preparation for the in-country experience, such as induction programs that involved language and cultural awareness, could be improved, as noted by host universities. The continued rollout of pre-departure cross-cultural awareness training will address some of these concerns.

With minor exceptions, the NCP's design features are viewed favourably by Australian and host universities. The design of the nomination and application process, the number of eligible locations, the guidance provided and the funding arrangements are thought to lay the foundation for engagement in the NCP over the longer term. As discussed elsewhere, the age eligibility restrictions, the functionality of the online management system and the usefulness of feedback on unsuccessful applications are areas that if addressed will further strengthen institutional and bilateral relations.

The evidence to support ACIL Allen's assessment against operational objective 4 is provided in Table 2.4 below.

TABLE 2.4 EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 4

Evaluation stage	Evidence to support assessment
Stage 1—nomination and application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Stage 1 report concluded that bilateral arrangements are difficult without established relationships. It also suggested that fee and accreditation requirements are hurdles. Evidence collected from consultations and surveys of home universities and host location organisations suggests that these barriers were being quickly overcome by home universities and host locations during the early stages of NCP
Stage 2—the in-country experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 3 of the Stage 2 report identified that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – host locations had high levels of satisfaction with the NCP pilot and had successfully built relationships with Australian institutions – students grasp of cultural differences and language are important to host locations perceptions of the NCP – the Case Manager could play an important role in helping institutions to build relationships however this opportunity had not been explored
Stage 3—post-NCP experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 5 of the Stage 3 report identified the: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – positive impact that NCP was having on the relationships between Australian universities and institutions in the region – absence of a tracking mechanism that would allow Government to demonstrate that new relationships were being developed by universities through NCP

SOURCE: FINAL EVALUATION REPORTS

2.5 Operational objective 5—the alumni community

The pilot programs' fifth operational objective is focused on the alumni community, as shown below:

Develop an alumni community that engages grant recipients and provides the opportunity for them to share their experiences, promote the NCP and continue to develop knowledge of and professional links with the Indo Pacific region.

The Stage 3 report examined whether the NCP had contributed to the development of an alumni community which engages program participants and provides opportunities for them to share their experiences/learnings.

The report showed that alumni were motivated to promote the NCP to other Australian students, and do so frequently. The results also suggest that the most useful alumni activities are job placements, professional networking and professional development opportunities. Social networking, access to mentors and participation in program development, such as delivering training, are important but were considered less useful. This suggests alumni are strongly motivated by activities that enable them to capitalise on the professional dimensions of their experience in the region, and that contributing to the development of the program or assisting other participants may be considered a less effective way of achieving this.

In the early stages of the pilot, participation in online alumni opportunities was low, however it appears that the online options provided by Government have matured considerably and have successfully engaged students' interest in social media and online professional networking platforms. The Government's investment in online social networking to support its *Global Alumni Engagement Strategy (2016-2020)*³ is a clear indication that digital engagement is the preferred method of supporting and continuing to build the alumni community. Alumni could be further encouraged to promote the NCP through online channels by requiring a firmer commitment to do so in the selection criteria at application stage, or incentivising it through a small grant for digital content production on their return to Australia. The online initiatives of established alumni programs in participating universities in Australia and the region provide access to a rich source of networks that may help to grow the alumni community further.

The evidence to support ACIL Allen's assessment against operational objective 5 is provided in Table 2.5 below.

TABLE 2.5 EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT ACIL ALLEN'S ASSESSMENT OF OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVE 5

Evaluation stage	Evidence to support assessment
Stage 1—nomination and application	– N/A
Stage 2—the in-country experience	– N/A
Stage 3—post-NPC experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Chapter 3 of the Stage 3 report identified that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – alumni have high levels of interest in alumni activities, to share experiences and develop professional links with the region – alumni are motivated to promote the program, but this is a lesser priority than personal development opportunities – little engagement with online resources at the time, but indications that social/professional networking is a priority – little use of existing alumni programs/networks within universities

SOURCE: FINAL EVALUATION REPORTS

2.6 Operational objective 6—evaluation and future development

The pilot programs' sixth operational objective is focused on evaluation to support the future development of NCP, as shown below:

Evaluate the pilot program to identify best practice and inform the future development scale-up of the NCP.

The Government ensured that evaluation was embedded in the design of NCP by evaluating the pilots from their early implementation. Table 1.1 (Chapter 1) demonstrates the breadth of best practice evaluation activities/tools developed and applied to this evaluation.

The insights generated by the evaluation were integrated into the Plan's design, administration and delivery since 2014. The evaluation has drawn on a range of quantitative and qualitative information sources to provide direct insights at each stage of the pilot life-cycle, as well as to the non-pilot phase implementation activities. Government's responsiveness to evaluation findings and its own intelligence gathered since the pilot has been important to the successful scale-up of NCP and has been noted by stakeholders.

The evaluation reports provide ample evidence that NCP has been well-designed and delivered and is well-placed to be scaled-up. Participating Australian universities anticipate that NCP will become a significant and long term investment by Government. Some universities are matching that investment with the establishment of longer-term arrangements and formal relationships, such as new exchange agreements, with Indo-Pacific institutions.

However, the evaluation found that universities are currently doing little to track the longer term impact of NCP on the participants' educational, research, professional and social achievement/connections. This is in

³ Australian Global Alumni Strategy (2016-2020), <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/australia-global-alumni-engagement-strategy-2016-2020.aspx>

part due to the difficulties universities face in tracking all student outcomes over the longer term and in part due to a lack of incentives/support offered to universities for this tracking. Universities will need some assistance and planning support from Government to ensure that students are tracked and the impacts are recorded.

As outlined in the Stage 2 Report, the evaluation activity undertaken by ACIL Allen has been 'formative' in that it adopted a program logic that enabled decision makers to identify and respond to early issues in administration and delivery, mindful of the overall objectives. Over time, evaluation activities should shift to focus on outcomes and seek to quantify and measure the medium and longer term impact of NCP that can be attributable to the Government's investment in the NCP. Some of these impacts have been documented in the evaluation reports, however, they are short term or medium term at best. It will take some time before the longer term impacts of NCP can be observed and reported.



This chapter considers the evidence from the evaluations in terms of the pilots' strategic intent. This intent is expressed in three strategic objectives, each of which has multiple and broad dimensions. Although the evaluation of the pilots was focused specifically on questions of design, administration and implementation, it nevertheless provides evidence to suggest that the NCP is achieving, or is on track to achieve, its strategic goals. In short, the NCP has helped to lift knowledge and strengthen connections between people and institutions in Australia and the Indo-Pacific region, and provided a platform to support greater outbound mobility into the future.

3.1 Strategic objective 1

NCP's first pilot-phase strategic objective was to:

Lift knowledge of the Indo Pacific region in Australia and strengthen our people to people and institutional relationships by increasing the number of Australian undergraduate students undertaking study and internships in the region.

Between 2014 and 2017 the NCP rapidly increased the number of Australian students undertaking study and internships/mentorships in the Indo-Pacific region. DFAT reports that around 17,500 students have been funded by the NCP in the past four years.⁴

A central finding of the evaluation is that participants increased their knowledge of the region and experienced new 'people to people' connections that may not have otherwise occurred. This is evident from alumni survey results in which the majority of alumni strongly agreed/agreed that they had gained knowledge of and connections in the region, as well as new levels of confidence to engage in or seek out work related to the region. Table 3.1 provides a snapshot of survey results which support these conclusions.

TABLE 3.1 SNAPSHOT OF ALUMNI SURVEY RESULTS

Objective	Measure	Strongly agree or agree (% of respondents)
Lift knowledge of the Indo-Pacific in Australia by increasing the number of Australian undergraduate students undertaking study and internships in the region	I gained useful knowledge and understanding of my host location(s)	97
Deepen Australia's people-to-people and institutional relationships with the region, through the engagement of students, universities, businesses and other stakeholder networks in the Program	I gained personal connections that have helped in my career	59

⁴ DFAT website: dfat.gov.au

Objective	Measure	Strongly agree or agree (% of respondents)
Increase the number of work-ready Australian graduates with regional experience.	I am confident in my ability to engage with people in the Indo-Pacific region	87
	I gained professional experience that has helped in my career	68
	I am more likely to seek out work relating to the Indo-Pacific region	83

SOURCE: NEW COLOMBO PLAN SURVEY 2016, AUSTRALIAN SURVEY RESEARCH

Likewise, for the overwhelming majority of universities consulted, the NCP has strengthened institutional relationships. As noted elsewhere, these relationships were not instantaneous and have taken time to mature. The NCP has provided a direct incentive for academic faculty members to explore and secure relationships, and building relationships with institutions in the region has become a common feature of the strategic planning commitments of Australian universities.

3.2 Strategic objective 2

NCP's second pilot-phase strategic objective was to:

Deepen Australia's relationship with the region through engagement of university, business and other stakeholder networks in supporting the program and ensuring such experiences are highly valued across the Australian community.

Promoting broad social, cultural and institutional links with the region is a core focus of Australia's public diplomacy effort. The contribution of the NCP to these goals is recognised in DFAT's *Public Diplomacy Strategy (2014-16)*⁵ and *Global Alumni Engagement Strategy (2016-2020)*,⁶ both of which associate the mobilisation of students and educational institutions with the promotion of Australia and its national interest in the region.

The evidence collected and reported during the evaluation suggests that the NCP is advancing Australia's broader educational and business goals in the region. Despite limitations in universities capability in the early stages, the NCP has become a catalyst for universities to pursue relationships they see valuing in pursuing, and generate mutual benefit to both the home and host organisations. As Government directs its efforts to engaging businesses and entrepreneurs in the NCP, networks are expected to continue to mature and deliver tangible benefits to participants now and into the future.

Looking to the future, most stakeholders believe that NCP is suitable for being scaled-up and have confidence in the program's ability to manage such growth. This rests in large part on the willingness of program administrators to improve NCP's delivery by expanding the number of eligible host locations, relaxing restrictions on age requirements and improving internal systems.

Strategically, further expansion of NCP should be undertaken in close consultation with universities to ensure the growth potential can be realised. Universities fulfil an important administrative support role in the NCP and are Government's primary link to students and institutional relationships in the region. Universities invest resources in identifying candidates and developing good quality applications, while also leveraging their institutional reputations to foster regional relationships that will advance the NCP. The ongoing support of universities is crucial to the continued success of the NCP.

⁵ Public Diplomacy Strategy (2014-16), <http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/public-diplomacy/Pages/public-diplomacy-strategy.aspx>

⁶ Global Alumni Strategy (2016-2020), <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/australia-global-alumni-engagement-strategy-2016-2020.aspx>

3.3 Strategic objective 3

The third strategic objective set for the NCP pilots was to:

Be transformational in establishing study in the Indo-Pacific region to become a 'rite of passage' for Australian undergraduates.

Over the past four years the NCP has rapidly accelerated the numbers of outbound students who study in the Indo-Pacific region. These students join the approximately five million tertiary students worldwide that studied abroad in 2015—a world-wide increase of 67 percent since 2005⁷—and the growing appetite amongst universities sector to support mobility programs.

While viewing study in the Indo-Pacific region as a 'rite of passage' is a long term endeavour, longitudinal studies about the mobility of Australian undergraduates suggests the NCP is contributing to a shift in this direction.

The Department of Education and Training's most recent annual survey of Australian universities found that 38,144 international study experiences were undertaken by undergraduate students in 2015, confirming Australia's participation in the international trend toward studying abroad.

The survey also found that 11,157 undergraduate domestic students travelled to NCP host locations in 2015, representing a 32 per cent increase on 2014, as shown in Table 3.2. The top five destinations for undergraduate domestic students in the Indo-Pacific were China (19.3 per cent), Indonesia (11 per cent), Japan (9.6 per cent), India (9.2 per cent) and Cambodia (6.5 per cent).

TABLE 3.2 AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ABROAD BY COUNTRY (ALL LEVELS)

Top 5 destination countries (2015)	2014 Number of experiences	2014 % of all experiences	2015 Number of experiences	2015 % of all experiences
USA	5,129	16.1	4,769	13.0
China	3,054	9.6	3,524	9.0
UK	2,919	9.1	3,304	9.0
Indonesia*	1,110	3.5	1,675	4.0
Canada*	1,583	5.0	1,468	4.0
Other	18,117	58.2	23,404	61.0
Total	31,912	100.0	38,144	100.0

Note: *In 2014 Canada ranked fourth and Indonesia sixth. Japan ranked fifth in 2014 and sixth in 2015.

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, RESEARCH SNAPSHOT 2017

In terms of the types of study experiences Australian students pursued in 2015, the survey found that student exchange programs (28 per cent) and faculty-led study tours (26 per cent) were the most popular types of study experiences among undergraduates, while postgraduate students most often travelled for research-related experiences (29 per cent). The majority (77 per cent) of study abroad experiences were for academic credit, and most (74 per cent) were for less than a semester. This is shown in Table 3.3.

TABLE 3.3 AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MOBILITY— BY TYPE (ALL LEVELS)

Type of experience	2012	2013	2014	2015
Exchange	7,813	8,571	8,750	8,539
Other semester or year-long programs	513	233	340	1517
Short-term programs	8,570	10,158	13,870	15,748
Internship or other practical placement	3,707	5,874	5,259	7,934
Research-related experience	3,868	4,056	2,135	3,257
Volunteering or community engagement experience	NR	NR	858	807

⁷ Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2017) *Research Snapshot*

Type of experience	2012	2013	2014	2015
Other	292	595	700	342
Total	24,763	29,487	31,912	38,144
Number of universities reporting	38	37	34	36

Note: NR—not reported

SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, RESEARCH SNAPSHOT 2017

These survey results not only highlight the growth in mobility in the Indo-Pacific region, they also support the claims of universities and students (which/who participated in the evaluation) that NCP has promoted outbound mobility as a pathway for students, and firmly-positioned it in the planning and strategic hierarchy of institutions. It is unlikely that this would have been achieved in the absence of NCP or a similar program.



Having observed the NCP, its participants and stakeholders in Australia and the region for over three years, the following general observations are made about its strengths and weaknesses to help inform future policy development and implementation.

4.1 The NCP objectives require sustained and long term investment

The Government's operational and strategic objectives for the NCP contain ambitious goals, such as the provision of innovative mobility opportunities, strengthening institutional relationships between Australian and host locations and establishing study in the region as a 'rite of passage' for Australian undergraduates.

The evaluation found that over the past three years the NCP has been tracking toward the achievement of such objectives, and has a strong base of support from stakeholders. But delivering on these goals will take time. Generating a selection of innovative mobility opportunities, for example, requires strong relationships and inter-institutional processes that are not immediately available to some universities. Likewise, facilitating internships for Australian students with local businesses and organisations in the region is not traditionally the focus of all universities, and to succeed will take additional capacity, new networks and trusted relationships.

The importance of taking a long term view of the NCPs goals is supported by recent findings of the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA). In a 2015 report *Smart Engagement with Asia*⁸ ACOLA argued that Australia needs to move past a focus on short-term economic benefits and to see the two-way benefits of deeper engagement. ACOLA believes that building Australia's inter-cultural competence requires 'smart engagement' and an emphasis on wide-ranging, long term, deep and mutually beneficial relations, based on the principle of reciprocity. The NCPs objectives are consistent with this, but will take a long term Government commitment to the Plan and to supporting universities to achieve it.

4.2 Appropriate evaluation helps builds trust and confidence

The Government's approach to evaluating the NCP during its implementation is consistent with the Australian Government's *Better Practice Guide: Successful Implementation of Policy Initiatives*⁹ (2014). The Guide emphasises the importance of evaluation processes to the feedback loops that enable the 'active management' of government activities. Active management enables entities to ensure that resources continue to be available and commensurate to the scope, risk and sensitivity of the implementation activities, while also providing leadership with the means to assess implementation progress, identify and address problems and review the ongoing relevance of the activity.

⁸ Ang, I., Tambiah, Y., and Mar, P. (2015) *Smart engagement with Asia: leveraging language, research and culture*. Report of the Australian Council of Learned Academies.

⁹ Developed by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Consistent with the *Better Practice Guide* it is evident from the evaluation that the NCP is meeting a range of best practice principles, including:

- developing key performance indicators that support outcomes measurement
- where multiple agencies are involved, ensuring a coordinated approach to monitoring evaluation
- actively engaging stakeholders, including those who are involved in its delivery
- ensuring data collection, analysis and reporting processes are robust and support effective evaluation
- reviewing progress and responding to the need for corrective action

The Better Practice Guide checklist is provided at Appendix C.

Throughout the evaluation, a consistently positive response from stakeholders is that they have felt engaged in the NCP's development. This sense of having been listened to is a direct reflection of the evaluation activities as they canvassed the views of Scholarship and Mobility students, and universities in Australia and in host locations. Interviews, surveys and focus groups provided multiple opportunities to comment on the NCP as it rolled out from 2014. Importantly, participants and stakeholders noted that Government responded to this feedback, as evidenced by the direct and timely changes that occurred in the design and delivery of the NCP as it evolved.

The decision to initiate (and respond to) an evaluation in NCP's early implementation has repercussions that flow beyond good program administration. It has created good-will and confidence in the future of the Plan. This good-will not only attracts new student participants, it bolsters the energies of the growing number of alumni to maintain connections with (and promote) the Plan. For universities, this good-will provides a platform from which to consolidate or extend relationships with host institutions across the region, and to attract business partners that can support internship and mentorship opportunities for their students.

While opportunities to provide feedback and shape the design of the NCP were welcomed and will have an enduring impact on the Plan, the associated burden needs careful consideration. As noted, throughout the evaluation NCP stakeholders have been called on to participate in a number of surveys, consultations and data requests. Towards the end of the evaluation (Stage 3) there was a noticeable difference in the willingness of universities and students to provide this feedback began to decline. It is not clear whether this was due to respondent fatigue or to the belief that the key feedback had already been provided and there was little new to offer.

Looking to the future, if monitoring the impacts and outcomes of the NCP involves engaging with the same stakeholders on multiple occasions and over an extended time, careful planning is required to ensure stakeholder engagement is innovative and remains meaningful. Some financial or other incentives may need to be introduced if such tracking is to be successful, particularly for students.

4.3 Measuring outcomes requires stronger monitoring

While the short term benefits of the NCP were clearly evidenced throughout evaluation, much less is available regarding the longer term impact of the NCP on the returnees and the bilateral arrangements. This is to be expected in part because it is still too early to be able to report on the longer term impacts for the students and institutions. More critical, however, is that there is little evidence of structured evaluation programs in place, whether within the home universities or elsewhere, to monitor and track the subsequent outcomes for NCP scholars and mobility grant alumni, or the home and host organisations

While there was widespread in principle support amongst university staff for stronger assessment of student and other impacts, what tracking is being done varies widely by university in terms of its extent and capability, and it was apparent that substantial progress in this area would be unlikely without some external stimulus, such as reporting to a consistent framework.

Consideration should therefore be given to embedding a stronger student and institutional outcome evaluation and reporting framework as part of the NCP funding provided to universities.

4.4 Continue to engage the alumni

A core objective of NCP is to develop an alumni community that engages participants and provides an opportunity for them to share their experiences, promote the NCP and continue to develop knowledge and professional links with the Indo-Pacific region. Stage 3 of the evaluation provided some evidence to suggest that alumni were keen to support the NCP in this way, particularly by engaging in social and professional networking with other NCP students, both online and at alumni events. At the time, however, alumni participation in online opportunities was low, with only 4 per cent of pilot participants surveyed indicating that they had engaged in these offerings.

Since that time Government has invested in a suite of online tools to support and promote connections between NCP participants past and future. The *Global Alumni Engagement Strategy (2016-2020)* in large part relies on the Global Alumni LinkedIn page and the Australian Global Alumni website and associated social media platforms to facilitate and strengthen alumni networks. Likewise, opportunities for the private sector to engage with universities and students in Australia and across the region is facilitated through an online portal—the Internship and Mentoring Network.

With approximately 99 percent of Australian 18-29 year olds and 96 per cent of 30-39 year olds using social media, establishing these channels is an excellent means of connecting NCP stakeholders, particularly student participants.¹⁰ The extent to which these online tools achieve the NCPs goals of deepening the connections between Australia and the region will depend in part of how they are allowed to mature. Typically government social media channels are used to market program information or share that of other institutional stakeholders, in this case universities. While this can accelerate the exposure of the NCP to traffic that passes through these channels, to achieve deeper connections the target audience needs to be able to contribute to and engage with the content on their own terms. For instance, NCP internships could incentivise students to produce and share digital content while on in-country, or on return. Allowing greater student input to its online channels requires trust on the part of government, but may ultimately enable it to advance the Indo-Pacific study experience as a 'rite of passage' in ways otherwise not possible.

4.5 Concluding remarks

The evaluation of the pilots conclude that NCP has been a successful policy initiative of Government. In summary, the conclusions are:

1. NCP has largely met, or is well advanced in developing the institutional capacity and relationships to meet, the operational objectives of the pilot phase.
2. The NCP is positively tracking towards its strategic objectives, noting that these objectives concern the long term impact of the Plan.
3. The NCP is well-regarded by stakeholders and is well-positioned to grow, if required. The government's decision to systematically undertake and respond to evaluation activities is key to this.
4. The NCP has greatly improved Australian students appreciation of and familiarity with the Indo-Pacific region, and established new relationships between people, educational institutions and businesses.

It is clear that NCP has the support of key stakeholders, which view the program design settings and administration favourably. Such support should ensure that NCP maintains its position as a signature policy initiative for supporting outbound mobility amongst Australian university students in the Indo-Pacific region for many years to come.

¹⁰ Sensis Social Media Report 2017.



A.1 Stage 1 evaluation questions

- To what extent did the application process contribute to the achievement of the NCP pilot objectives for the program?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the application process and what recommendations (if any) could be made to improve it?
- For the Scholarship program pilot only, explore the strengths and weaknesses of the nomination and application process, or single application process.
- To what extent did the other program design elements of the pilot (such as eligibility and selection criteria) contribute to the achievement of the operational objectives for the program?
- To what extent did the program design and selection process lead to the identification of recipients that will contribute to the achievement of the operational objectives?

A.2 Stage 2 evaluation questions

- What were the most valuable aspects of the recipient's program? In doing so, consider whether the pilots have: a) enriched existing relationships between universities and host locations and b) created new relationships or partnerships in host countries
- To what extent did the experience of the recipients/scholars while on their program inform their knowledge and understanding of the Asia Pacific as a study and business destination?
- Is the program being administered and delivered in the most efficient way? In doing so, consider the challenges and opportunities faced by: c) Australian universities with regard to the delivery and management of the program, d) stakeholders in pilot destinations with regard to the delivery and management of the program, and e) Department of Education program managers
- What were the key challenges faced by recipients/scholars while on their program, were they overcome and could they be addressed in the future design of the program?
- Is data collection adequate to support long-term evaluation of the program?
- The Scholarship specific question is: What is the role of the case manager in supporting students and helping them to fulfil their obligations?

A.3 Stage 3 evaluation questions

- To what extent do the Scholars/Mobility grant recipients perceive their NCP experience enhanced their studies, employment prospects and understanding/connections to the Indo Pacific region?
- Mobility-focused question—To what extent have universities enriched their existing relationships and or/created new relationships or partnerships in host locations from short and semester long Mobility projects?
- Scholarship-focused question—To what extent have universities enriched their existing relationships and or/created new relationships or partnerships in host locations from the Scholarship Pilot Program?
- What longer term benefits and challenges have participating Australian universities experienced through their involvement in the NCP?
- Mobility-focused question— What longer term benefits and challenges have Australian universities experienced through their approach to developing short and semester long Mobility projects?
- What longer term benefits and challenges have participating host universities (in the pilot locations) experienced through their involvement in the NCP?
- What longer term benefits and challenges have participating businesses observed through their involvement in the NCP?
- To what extent have Scholars/Mobility grant recipients participated in community development/advocacy activities on their return to Australia?



As outlined in Chapter 1, the evaluation has assessed each pilot program in three stages (the application process, in-country experience, and returnee experience), drawing out the distinct experiences and requirements of Scholarship and Mobility students wherever applicable and possible. Each stage draws information and insights from a combination of program data, consultations, targeted surveys, workshops and document analysis.

B.1 Stage 1 findings

The Stage 1 evaluation focused on the nomination and application processes of the pilots. The analysis included consideration of the processes that underpinned Government's assessment of student/university applications, which also involved the interviewing and selection of scholars, and the support, advice and training provided to students prior to departure.

B.1.1 Nomination and application processes used for the Scholarship Program

The Australian universities consulted and surveyed for Stage 1 identified a number of strengths in the design and administration of the pilots. These included the dual nomination and application processes, which provides universities with opportunities to pre-screen candidates and nominate only those candidates that best represent the values and image the universities are trying to portray with their Indo-Pacific partners. A dual nomination and application process was also viewed as being consistent with universities' intention to provide nominees with guidance and support throughout the application, interview and selection process.

Other areas of strength identified by universities included the Education Scholarship Support Team's support to universities (and students) during the application window. The interview processes (administered by staff the NCP Secretariat) was also seen to enable the selection of high quality scholars who displayed both academic and non-academic attributes.

Furthermore the funding model, which is considered sufficient to cover the costs of (and provide a strong incentive for) scholars while in-country, received high levels of support from the majority of universities consulted. The funding on offer for the Scholarship Pilot Program was also viewed favourably by the large majority of Scholars who responded to a Stage 1 survey.

Areas identified as requiring further attention or improvement in the Scholarship Pilot Program were also highlighted during Stage 1. These included the processes to support university tracking of nominated candidates, especially in addressing last minute withdrawals, and the timeframes associated with nominations and applications.

The time of year and lead time for nominations were raised as areas requiring improvement. The timing of the 2014 nominations prevented some universities from identifying high quality candidates within the nomination window. A number of universities suggested that issues related to timing prevented all faculties with an interest in NCP from identifying suitable nominees.

Universities also raised some concerns about core eligibility criteria and their application during the 2014 nomination and application rounds. The age, undergraduate and host location criteria received most criticism as they imposed limitations on the ability of some universities to select worthy students.

B.1.2 Nomination and application processes used for the Mobility Program

The Australian universities consulted for Stage 1 identified a number of strengths associated with the Mobility Pilot Program. These included the support and guidance provided by the Education Mobility Support Team during the application window, as well as post-funding processes, which provided universities with the flexibility to make changes to planned programs and to carry funding between Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 applications. Australian universities further noted that the flexible funding model offered incentives to participate in NCP, and the selection of host locations allowed universities to cover a wide range of academic disciplines and fields of study.

The areas identified as requiring future attention or improvement included publicity of NCP at the university-level which was thought to lack the detail necessary for engaging faculties which do not traditionally participate in outbound mobility (such as the science, mathematics and engineering faculties of universities). Publicity of the NCP for Mobility students within universities and faculties was also raised as an issue by students consulted, with a number learning about their overseas internship as a requirement of their course, and at least initially not being aware of the role that the NCP had played in facilitating the internship.

Also varied amongst mobility students was awareness of other supporting global Mobility supports available within the universities, for example to assist with travel expenses. Depending on the country location and travel notice available, some students reported being out-of-pocket after their Mobility grant in the order of \$1,000-1,500 (albeit happy to contribute this given the experience they gained), while others were well supported with complementary university assistance. Moreover, some received the NCP directly while for others the NCP funds were provided to and accessed from the host organisation. This is not an issue of the NCP *per se*, but more of the advice provided as part of being provided with NCP funding, and particularly an issue where students may not be fully aware of the Mobility grant in the first place.

Internal university processes for identifying worthy Mobility projects were also seen to be a significant barrier to the broad participation of faculties during the pilot year. At that time many universities consulted did not have the internal processes for identifying suitable faculty-led Mobility projects and were seeking advice and guidance about how best to generate the interest required for a high quality application to Government. The time of academic year and time available for applications did not allow universities to identify the most suitable study options.

Other barriers to participation included the age, undergraduate and host location criteria, and internships and mentorships that are limited by professional accreditation requirements. The desire of universities to gradually reduce (or even remove) these barriers proved to be a consistent theme throughout the entire evaluation.

The length of Mobility grants was also raised as a consideration. While there was a general view that semester long internships would provide a richer in-country experience, many of the students consulted indicated that they would have found this difficult, both in terms of the impact on their part-time employment and their ability to sustain the workload they experienced in their 2-3 week internships. A model suggested for consideration was an initial short internship, to validate their interest and preparedness to potentially build onto a second semester long experience.

B.1.3 Other findings identified during Stage 1

The ability of NCP to stimulate both new and innovative study options for students/scholars was an aim of the pilot programs. Universities consulted for Stage 1 noted some difficulties in identifying innovative or new programs due to the relatively short timeframes for application. This meant that

most universities consulted reported using the existing relationships already held by faculties to identify study options and programs for their applications. For some universities, there were also significant costs involved in establishing programs with host location organisations. These costs could not be immediately recouped through student fees and required long term and strategic investment by the university before they could be established.

Similarly, a large majority of universities consulted for Stage 1 noted the difficulties in supporting NCP's internship and mentorship aspirations. At that time, most universities reported a lack of existing networks, relationships and internal capability to identify internship and mentorship opportunities for their students/scholars in the pilot host location destinations. Of those universities who reported some track record in supporting overseas-based internships/mentorships, most held existing relationships outside the pilot host locations and thus called for an extension in the number of eligible locations under the NCP Program Guidelines.

The Stage 1 evaluation also raised particular issues in relation to meeting the visa and accommodation requirements placed on scholars/students. Survey results at that time showed the need for Government to better support students/scholars to overcome any barriers confronting their successful participation in the future.

B.1.4 Areas for improvement identified during stage 1

The evidence collected during Stage 1 suggested that the processes (and design elements that support the processes) are well placed for an expansion of the NCP. Areas where issues were identified in relation to scaling-up the NCP roll out are:

- *Promotion*—publicity and promotion (including provision of promotional material) for NCP will under expansion place greater demands on communications aimed at ensuring universities nominate their strongest students. In addition, the internal processes used by universities to gain expressions of interest from academic leaders—which help develop high quality study options from faculties and schools—need development.
- *Timing*—ideally the nomination and application submission dates are within the standard teaching window or are moved to the middle of each semester to provide academics with the best possible window to develop study options and submit applications for funding.
- *Application processes*—country-specific interview panel format, which while considered to be highly effective, will be challenged under an expansion of host locations. Internal university processes for nominating students and developing applications, which require guidance and support to help identify high quality candidates from faculties and schools.
- *Consistency of awareness*—while universities and faculties should be able to accommodate local requirements, consideration should be given to greater degree of consistency in being made aware of membership of the NCP, and the associated financial supports, including any from the university, especially in the case of Mobility internships, where the application process has been made on behalf of, and not necessarily involving, the students.
- *Outcomes*—notification of outcomes to universities and individual students and delivering tailored feedback to successful and non-successful applicants will help maintain interest in NCP at the university-level. Further, there is a need to improve the means of tracking nominees and applicants so that universities can monitor the progress of nominated students and take remedial action if any issues arise.

B.2 Stage 2 findings

Stage 2 focused on the experiences of NCP participants from the time they undertook their study option in host locations to shortly after their return to Australia. The report drew heavily on survey results from those students who had participated in the pilots, and was supplemented with a focus group of students who had completed their study component. It also canvassed the views of host institutions via consultations and an online survey.

The Stage 2 report identified that both Mobility students and Scholars participated in NCP because of the strongly held beliefs that NCP would support their longer term work plans and ambitions to study

in the Indo-Pacific region. To a lesser extent students also reported that encouragement from their home university was an important factor in deciding whether to participate in the pilots.

The report also identified the aspects of NCP that were most valued by students and scholars. For example, for those Mobility students who visited Indonesia, culture (27 per cent) and study development (15 per cent) were the most valued aspects of NCP, while for Mobility students who visited Hong Kong SAR study development (30 per cent) and culture (24 per cent) were the most valued.

Language and cultural training is both a formal and informal part of a Mobility student's and a Scholar's NCP experience. Scholars receive cultural training at the formal pre-departure sessions provided by Government. Universities may choose to provide additional or complementary cultural training if they elect to. This training can be extended to include the participation of Mobility students, however, at the discretion of the home university.

Scholars and Mobility students can also elect to undertake language training as an eligible in-country experience related to their study component, internship or mentorship. Host location organisations may provide language and cultural training to NCP recipients as part of their formal hosting duties. The decision to provide such training is at the sole discretion of the host location organisation.

Survey results indicate there was variation in pilot phase Mobility students' access to language and cultural training, with 35 per cent undertaking both, and 37 per cent undertaking neither. The majority was undertaken at home universities (40 per cent undertook language training and 50 per cent undertook cultural training), or host universities (30 per cent undertook language training and 50 per cent undertook cultural), and most found it very or somewhat helpful (95 per cent and 85 per cent respectively).

Proportionately fewer Scholars undertook language and cultural training, with 4 per cent undertaking both and 52 per cent undertaking neither. The majority of language training (70 per cent) was independently sourced from a third party, while 10 per cent of survey respondents received cultural training from the host university. All respondents found the language training very or somewhat helpful, while approximately 43 per cent of respondents found the cultural training very or somewhat helpful.

An overwhelming majority of Mobility and Scholarship survey respondents reported having obtained an improved knowledge and understanding of their host location (99 and 100 per cent), that they were more Asia-capable (85 and 96 per cent), and had become more enthusiastic about travelling and engaging with Asia (96 and 100 per cent).

B.2.1 Challenges experienced by students while in-country

Mobility

The most significant challenges identified by Mobility students were speaking a foreign language (35 per cent) and building local networks (23 per cent). Of these challenges, approximately half were overcome by students. For example, for students who felt that speaking a foreign language was a very large challenge (42 per cent) completely or mostly overcame the challenge. Moreover, for students who felt that building local networks was a very large challenge, approximately 52 per cent completely or mostly overcame the challenge.

A number of the Mobility students consulted reported that they relied on the language skills of one or more of the students in their group, or their supervising teachers, and that their in-country work and experience would have been greatly diminished if not for these.

Scholarship

For Scholars, the most significant issues were arranging an internship or mentorship (45 per cent), understanding the host organisation's processes (35 per cent) and building local networks (35 per cent). For students who felt that arranging an internship/mentorship was a significant challenge, approximately 40 per cent completely or mostly completely overcame the challenge. For students who felt that understanding the host organisation's processes was a significant challenge 67 per cent of students completely or mostly overcame the challenge. For students who identified that

building local networks was a significant challenge 50 per cent completely or mostly overcame the challenge.

These results, to some degree, mirror those of the Mobility program and suggest that most students who participated in NCP were able to successfully overcome the barriers experienced while in-country.

B.2.2 Host location perspectives of NCP

The Stage 2 report drew on consultation and survey findings to better understand the experiences of organisations which host NCP students. The vast majority of organisations reported high satisfaction levels with the NCP pilot programs (85 and 100 per cent were either extremely satisfied, very satisfied or satisfied with each of the Mobility and Scholarship pilot programs respectively).

Similarly large numbers of survey respondents completely or partly agreed that the Mobility and Scholarship NCP pilot programs had helped them build relations back to Australia generally (82 and 97 per cent) and with the Australian universities in particular (88 and 62 per cent).

In relation to issues and challenges faced by host organisations, for Mobility students the majority were in dealing with cultural differences (n=14), language skills (n=9) and knowledge of local practices (n=7). The patterns were less discernible for Scholars given the smaller sample, but the highest issues reported were obtaining the appropriate visa (n=4) and language skills (n=3). This was reaffirmed strongly in consultations with a selection of host location contact officers, even though response rates to these particular survey questions were relatively low.

A specific issue identified from Scholarship host location survey results is that they reported becoming aware of NCP pilot students at different points in time, with 59 per cent during the initial stages of arranging the students' stay but 22 per cent after this but before their arrival, and 15 per cent during the students' stay.

As with students above, the host locations consulted identified some areas that they believed would assist the NCP, which included:

- Greater preparation prior to departure, with students often inadequately prepared for their initial time in the host location (Mobility and Scholarship), even though many reported that they overcame this challenge by the end of their in-country experience. Students undertaking more language and cultural training, as such training is linked to some of the major challenges experienced by host locations. Relatedly, specific support to help the students manage the number of transitions they face between cultures, lifestyles learning environments and workplaces. For example, this support could provide students with additional induction sessions when they arrive at the host location. Induction could be mandatory and include information about the expectations of the host location and the customs of the local environment that is in addition to the pre-departure support provided by government and universities.
- More individualised support for Mobility students by host organisations, similar to though not at the level or intensity of case manager support provided for Scholarship recipients; some universities do use the services of the contracted Case Manager or similar providers.

Scholarship recipients rated the *case manager support* provided highly with over 80 per cent being satisfied or very satisfied with nearly all of the roles expected from case managers. The only exceptions to this were providing advice on accommodation and being knowledgeable about their host location, people, culture and customs, business and study. Host organisations had similarly high satisfaction levels, with 78 per cent rating case manager support as very or moderately effective.

- A number of suggestions were provided which may improve the design and delivery of NCP for future students. For the students who liaise with the case manager, the key improvements centred on the travel advice/support provided to students while in-country and the level of responsiveness of the case manager to email requests/communication. For the case manager, the opportunities to improve NCP's delivery centred on enhancing pre-departure support provided to scholars, information sharing, alumni and internships/mentorships.

B.2.3 Areas for improvement identified during Stage 2

The Stage 2 report identified a number of specific areas where further consideration is required by Government. These areas included:

- Greater access to language and cultural training prior to departure, including detailed in-country briefings, and improved language training and support while in-country as well as support to help the students with the transition to the host location cultures and lifestyles, and in the case of Mobility students, between school and the workplace. Additional support to expedite Visa and travel related issues while in-country would also be beneficial.
- Improved branding of NCP within host locations to enable students to more readily connect with other NCP students, scholars and exchange students while in-country. More formal linkages to Australian businesses operating in the host location would also assist.

The NCP Secretariat has implemented a number of changes which not only respond to feedback and reports from the NCP evaluation, but also as result of insights gained through its own post-pilot implementation activities. These include:

- Increased support to improve uptake and consistence in the delivery of cultural and language training to Mobility and Scholarship students. For example, NCP will roll out pre-departure cross-cultural awareness training to around 7,000 NCP mobility students between 2016 and 2019, in addition to the pre-departure training provided to Scholarship students.
- Support for students to obtain visas, through the provision of advice and advocacy services to students and their home universities.
- Greater facilitation of internships/mentorships while students are in-country. The NCP Secretariat has undertaken promotional and awareness activities to support greater up-take. It has also amended program guidelines and pre-departure activities to increase the awareness of internship/mentorship opportunities for NCP.
- Assisting students with their accommodation needs or to overcome accommodation issues, which includes resolution of issues for those students visiting Hong Kong SAR and face accommodation difficulties.
- Assistance to resolve study option/project issues between home and host universities through changes to the program guidelines which explicitly authorise universities to use program administration funding for this purpose.
- Further promotion of the New Colombo Plan in Australia and in host locations through greater awareness raising at key events, the publication of online material and more active support for the alumni community.

B.3 Stage 3 findings

The Stage 3 evaluation report reflected on the post-NCP experience in terms of the short to medium impact on students, universities and host locations. It also considered whether NCP's design and administrative arrangements would support a continued expansion of the Plan and were suitable for its future evolution. The Stage 3 report drew heavily on findings from consultations with universities, survey results of NCP Alumni and selected program data.

Overall the evidence collected during Stage 3 reflected very positively on NCP's design and administration and the role of Education and DFAT in the Plan's ongoing delivery. Universities particularly valued the responsiveness of Government to improvements suggestions and the resulting refinements that have been made following the initial pilot phase. The feedback provided by universities applied equally to the Mobility and Scholarship pilot programs.

B.3.1 Evidence of impact on participants

The Stage 2 analysis of the in-country student experience highlighted that exposure to different cultures, study development and work development were generally the most valued aspects of participation in the NCP. Evidence from an alumni survey conducted during Stage 3, together with evidence from the final reports of Scholarship students, further confirmed that the NCP has an overwhelmingly positive impact on students.

For both Mobility and Scholarship students the most beneficial elements of the program clearly align with the strategic objectives NCP, namely to:

- lift knowledge of the Indo-Pacific in Australia
- deepen Australia's people-to-people and institutional relations with the region
- establish study in the Indo-Pacific as a rite of passage for Australian undergraduate students
- increase the number of work-ready Australian graduates with regional experience.

Many of the impacts of participation in Scholarship and Mobility programs will be long term in nature and may not be fully evident for some time. In the short-to-medium term, perhaps the best indicators of impact are based on the level of Mobility activity generated and the visible changes that have been observed in and by the students participating. These include:

- the provision of relevant work experience and cementing of career goals through a placement opportunity that is not otherwise as readily available in undergraduate study
- the gaining of independence and confidence in working with communities and professionals through exposure to officials and organisations as part of Mobility projects
- the raising of interest in developing countries and other cultures
- the promotion of overseas travel, to locations that may not have been the first port of destination, and for some at all.

Impacts of the NCP were also two-way, with benefits for host location students and organisations also observed, including through transfer of skills and culture, and through direct community activities such as fundraising and volunteering.

B.3.2 Areas for improvement identified in Stage 3

NCP's design features

The Stage 3 report considered the underpinning design elements of NCP and whether they will meet the future needs of NCP—especially if it continues to grow. Overall, stakeholders report a level of comfort with the design features of NCP and are not suggesting wholesale changes are needed into the future. Most stakeholders (in particular, home universities) have welcomed Government's continued refinement of the eligibility criteria which exclude potentially worthy candidates from participating in NCP. The refinement of the application of the age criterion was particularly well received by universities which have students who are typically above the age of 28 years.

That being said, the evaluation did identify specific matters that require further consideration by Government. These include:

- Communication of the NCP expectations and decisions is vital to stakeholders. It was widely noted that improvements have been made in the information for applicants, including to the FAQ, and that the program guidelines are generally clear and comprehensive. Some universities reiterated the importance of flagging any changes that are proposed to the Guidelines as they use the guidelines in their on-ward communication with students and academics. Relatedly, universities are seeking more individualised feedback on unsuccessful applications, both to support students through the process and to retain the interest of academics that invest considerable effort in developing and ranking the applications.
- While most universities are comfortable with NCP's eligibility and selection criteria, for regional universities with high numbers of mature students, the restrictions on age are reported to be having a discriminatory effect. Indeed, for universities with certain student demographics, further relaxation of the age requirement may boost their participation in NCP.
- Funding arrangements are generally thought to be fit for purpose, yet too generous for some locations. An opportunity exists to tailor funding support to better reflect the living costs in different host locations.
- Universities and students are seeking a balance to be maintained between short term and semester based-programs. Universities appreciate the flexibility afforded to them in selecting programs that meet the preferences of their students and the types of programs faculties wish to pursue.

- Arrangements that support the desires of Mobility students to engage in an internship/mentorship could be improved, particularly where universities do not have institutional relationships to leverage opportunities for students, nor access to the internship/mentorship portal to assist students to identify opportunities. Further, for those universities that source specialised advice about these opportunities, the fee-for-service reduces the financial aid available to students decreasing if not completely negating the attractiveness of the program.
- Alumni report having high levels of interest in the alumni activities sponsored by Government and are keen to share experiences and develop professional links with the region. Alumni also show signs of being motivated to promote the program, but there appears to be limited engagement of students in those alumni activities supported by Government and the universities.
- Universities appear to be doing little to formally monitor the activities of, and hence impact on, returning participants. While the NPC Secretariat is developing opportunities to maintain professional connections and engage alumni in advocacy and promotional activities, the considerable experience and investment of universities in their existing alumni programs could also be utilised to this end.

NCP's administrative arrangements

Overall stakeholders (including students) report a level of satisfaction with the delivery of both the Mobility and Scholarship programs. For the Stage 3 report only two administrative arrangements were highlighted as requiring further consideration by Government, which are:

- The administrative functionality of the online application and management system could be improved. Participating Australian universities identified two main concerns: first, that managing input of data about students participating in the Mobility program is difficult and time consuming, particularly for information that is unknown before departure or often changing, such as destination phone numbers; and second, that administrative processes, such as electronic signatures and the ability to leave queries on specific fields, would improve the functionality of the system for administrators.
- The flow of information from Government to universities and students could be improved. Participating Australian universities highlighted both students' and academics' desire for feedback about decisions on individual applications. While acknowledging that the effort that this may involve, they contended it is key to maintaining high levels of support and ongoing engagement in the program.



TABLE C.1 CHECKLIST OF KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS—MONITORING, REVIEW AND EVALUATION

Key question	
Are processes for monitoring, review and evaluation activities in place? Do these activities address the initiative's progress against key implementation deliverables?	
Are there robust key performance indicators in place? The criteria set out in ANAO Report No.21 2013–14, Pilot Project to Audit Key Performance Indicators may assist in assessing appropriateness of an entity's key performance indicators.	
Has the design, collection and collation of data to support the measurement of performance been considered from an early stage? Is the approach adopted sufficient to meet any legislative or government reporting obligations?	
Is data supporting performance and progress reporting sufficient for their purpose?	
Is the implementation subject to the Gateway Review Process? If so, has adequate consideration been given to the documentation required?	
Is the initiative part of a New Policy Proposal that is subject to the ICT Two-Pass Review process? If so, has adequate consideration been given to the documentation and lead times required?	
Are risks to success reviewed at appropriate intervals, and are the results of these reviews provided to senior management and, as necessary, ministers?	
Are appropriate escalation strategies in place?	
Are concerns and lessons learned addressed before progressing to the next stage of multi-staged initiatives?	
Is there a willingness to intervene with corrective action or, if necessary, close down the implementation if benefits are not being achieved or are not on track?	
In the case of cross-entity initiatives, have reporting responsibilities and requirements been identified?	
Is the lead entity's role supported by monitoring activities conducted by other entities? How is this integrated and assessed to provide a coherent picture?	
Are there appropriate feedback loops to learn the lessons from the implementation? Are the feedback loops commensurate to the scale, risk and cost of the initiative?	

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET, A BETTER PRACTICE GUIDE: SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY INITIATIVES (2014)

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