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### **Go8 Submission to the new International Development Policy**

The Group of Eight (Go8), comprising Australia's leading research-intensive universities, welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission for the Government's new International Development Policy. Please note that this submission represents the views of the Go8 network, and member universities may choose to make their own submissions.

**Please also note that the Go8 consents for this submission to be published in full.**

The Australian Government's new International Development Policy is an opportunity to build stronger partnerships with our closest regional neighbours to support shared prosperity, stability, and security. The Go8 universities, with seven members ranked in the top 100 universities in the world and with strong global partnerships, are a key national asset.

The Go8 makes a significant contribution to promoting a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. The role of universities as a tool for soft diplomacy is well understood and recognised by this Government, however there is scope to further leverage the positive influence of universities in the region to help meet current and future development needs. This will advance both the interests of our regional neighbours and position Australia as a partner of choice in the region.

Go8 universities provide the high-level skills that open up a world of opportunities for individuals from developing nations which in turn, contribute to sustainable social development. Education has long been recognised for its transformative powers in lifting people out of poverty and improving livelihoods. A world-class university education provides the opportunity for individuals to develop the advanced skills needed for high-paying and secure jobs, to build the highly skilled workforce needed to drive innovation and economic growth, and support stability across the region.

### **Challenges and longer-term trends in our region**

Australia's future security and prosperity is inextricably linked to the Indo-Pacific. The challenges facing our region are well understood and include climate change, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing poverty and strategic contest. Economic recovery, climate change, and escalating geopolitical tensions are complex challenges in and of themselves but are also increasingly interrelated.

As cautioned by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Penny Wong at the UN General Assembly in September, “there is a growing scale of human suffering that threatens untold global instability.”<sup>1</sup>

The economic impact of COVID-19 has seen inflation and interest rates rise, countries around the world are currently staring down the barrel of a possible recession and are juggling the need to provide financial relief whilst also investing in necessary technology and infrastructure, such as renewable energy. Climate change will have a significant impact on Australia’s engagement with its closest neighbours and will drive demand for sustainable renewable energy.

Digital transformation will also be a challenge for our region. Digitisation and technology have changed how businesses operate and will shape the nature of jobs in Australia. The Go8 has made a series of recommendations to Government about investing in our IT workforce to meet current and future demands. In addition, cyber security risks have escalated as seen recently and Australia needs the skills and capability to protect citizens from domestic cyber attacks as well as international threats.

The skills crisis extends across industry sectors in Australia and the Indo-Pacific. This has placed continued high demand for workers across the region, with employers grappling to fill vacancies in critical areas of our economy. Greater incentives to attract and retain skilled graduates will be essential to address these skills shortages.

The Go8 therefore proposes the following recommendations to address risks and realise opportunities to enhance Australia’s international development engagement.

### **Key recommendations**

1. That the Government recognise the Go8 universities as a national asset to be leveraged in pursuit of a more prosperous, stable and secure Indo-Pacific.
2. That the Government consider working with Go8 universities on a small post-graduate exchange pilot program for higher degree and early researchers, similar to the New Colombo Plan, to strengthen regional cooperation.
3. That the Government recognise, prioritise and enhance funding support for research in areas critical to Australia’s interests and those of the region, as well as build capabilities.

Building sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific has never been more important. Australia must not only strengthen its relationships with key regional neighbours but ensure this engagement is facilitated by a long-term, strategic partnership. To do this, Australia should seek to leverage its competitive advantages. This includes geolocation, economic and humanitarian aid but most importantly, the high-quality education and advanced research of Go8 universities.

Whilst continued funding to assist regional cooperation, such as the Australia Awards program and New Colombo Plan (NCP), will be important to boost Australia’s position in the region, Australia’s investment should go further.

One practical measure to support greater engagement in the region is a post-graduate exchange program for higher degree and early researchers. Student exchange programs such as the NCP have long been recognised for their ability to lift knowledge and deepen Australia’s bilateral relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/penny-wong/speech/national-statement-un-general-assembly-new-york>

However, the NCP is only open to undergraduate students and Australia does not have an equivalent post-graduate exchange program to support two-way mobility in the Indo-Pacific. The Australia Awards program is an important initiative to expand the skills and networks of emerging leaders in the Indo-Pacific, but these scholarships do not offer two-way exchange or the same reciprocal benefits as the NCP. This is an area where Australia can do more, especially if we are to improve Asian and Pacific language literacy and cross-cultural competency to help us work together on our shared regional challenges.

A scholarship program for Australian researchers would be an important investment to foster a talented cohort of next generation and future leaders, who would in return be capable of supporting Australia and its partnerships in the region.

Australia should also harness the opportunity to diversify education and training programs and delivery modes, in conjunction with industries and third parties. This would not only help increase graduate capabilities with skills relevant to future jobs and development needs in the region but also address equity gaps. Adopting flexible approaches to learning through digital technologies can widen access and participation for a diverse range of students and help to break down barriers for underrepresented groups.

Realising the potential of digital technologies should also go hand in hand with an increased investment in research development, particularly in shared priority areas, to also build capability within the Indo-Pacific. It is critical that Australia continues to advance science, technology and innovation and introduce incentives to support overseas business innovation and investment.

Given that Australia has both a security and humanitarian interest in ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific, boosting funding for projects aimed at building skills, economic independence, and raising education standards is in the national interest. Go8 universities are pursuing a range of projects in these critical areas (as outlined below) and stand ready to scale up their capabilities to support development across the region.

When considering lessons from Australia's past development efforts, there is a need to develop further mechanisms for Australian universities to work together in the region to avoid bidding against each other. This would not only place us in a better position vis-à-vis international competitors but also maximise outcomes for Australia as a whole. Australia should continue to support critical infrastructure across the region and continue to improve education access and education quality assurance systems.

The new international development policy should also promote greater transparency and accountability. For example, establishing cross-portfolio outcomes, measuring outcomes against multiple levels (e.g. economic, social, and environmental) and ensuring mechanisms for independent evaluations and public consultation, reporting and feedback.

### **Go8 – global development outreach**

Go8 universities are leaders in research, conducting 70 percent of all university-based research in Australia. Go8 researchers are focused on solving the world's greatest challenges and have a strong track record of working in partnership with communities in the Indo-Pacific to support Sustainable Development Goals. Importantly, this work is building capacity and empowering local leadership to ensure solutions include local knowledge, meet local needs, and can be sustained.

Examples of our global development outreach include, but are certainly not limited to, the following initiatives:

- The **University of Melbourne** offers the **Melbourne Climate Action Scholarship**<sup>2</sup> - a fully funded climate action scholarship for students from Pacific Island nations to support their communities in addressing climate change.
- The **University of Queensland** facilitates **UQ International Development**<sup>3</sup>, one of the leading university development groups in the Asia-Pacific region, which applies university expertise to make a positive impact on developing countries. One example of this work includes designing a Train the Trainer package for local experts in Indonesia, Bangladesh and the wider Asia region so that they can deliver training related to preventing violence against women.
- The **University of New South Wales (UNSW)** hosts the **Institute for Global Development**<sup>4</sup>, which supports the work of UNSW researchers working on international and local projects, including delivering renewable energy to Vanuatu; improving infectious disease management in Myanmar; and controlling neglected tropical diseases in Fiji and the Solomon Islands.
- The **Australian National University** hosts the **Global Institute for Women's Leadership**<sup>5</sup>, chaired and founded by the Honourable Julia Gillard AC, which brings together a global network of accomplished research partners to improve workplace gender equality and women's leadership, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific region.
- **Monash University** is home to the **Revitalising Informal Settlements and their Environments**<sup>6</sup> (RISE) initiative, which is an ambitious research program trialling innovative and sustainable water and sanitation solutions in 24 informal settlements in Fiji and Indonesia.
- The **University of Sydney** hosts the **Sydney Southeast Asia Centre**<sup>7</sup>, which is supporting researchers from across the University to apply their disciplinary expertise to a broad range of real-world issues in Southeast Asia. The Centre also offers students the opportunity to participate in field schools, where they can apply their research skills to address real-world problems such as anti-microbial resistance in Cambodia; disaster risk and resilience in the Philippines; and social justice in Indonesia.

As these examples illustrate, the Go8 is actively engaged in the Indo-Pacific and has built a strong and trusted profile over decades of collaboration, including well-established alumni networks which help to keep Australia connected to the region. These institutional relationships across the region provide strategic value and have delivered projects that have improved community wellbeing and environmental sustainability in many developing countries, with significant societal and economic impact. Our research and education partnerships directly contribute to Sustainable Development Goals and help to ensure we are in a strong position to meet shared regional challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://scholarships.unimelb.edu.au/awards/melbourne-climate-action-scholarship>

<sup>3</sup> <https://global-partnerships.uq.edu.au/international-development>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.igd.unsw.edu.au/our-initiatives>

<sup>5</sup> <https://giwl.anu.edu.au/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.monash.edu/msdi/initiatives/rise>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sydney.edu.au/sydney-southeast-asia-centre/>



Further, the soft power diplomacy our universities provide through education and research directly supports the Government's foreign policy and defence strategies by cementing our multi-lateral alliances across the Indo-Pacific.

The Government's new International Development Policy is an ideal vehicle through which to drive deeper regional engagement.

As always, the Go8 is happy to discuss the recommendations and issues raised in this submission. I can be contacted via my Chief Operating Officer, Tracey Wright, via email: [tracey.wright@go8.edu.au](mailto:tracey.wright@go8.edu.au) or phone: 0408 885 751.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "V. Thomson", written in a cursive style.

**VICKI THOMSON**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**