

Submission to inform Australia's new International Development Policy

The **University of Queensland (UQ)** is pleased to provide a submission to inform Australia's new International Development policy. This submission has been prepared by UQ's International Development unit with contributions from university staff with extensive experience in the design and delivery of development projects or the conduct of research in respect of development focussed challenges and solutions (see Appendix 1).

UQ – Our Organisation – Background and Context

UQ is ranked in the world's top 50 universities and is one of Australia's leading research and teaching institutions. The University's core purpose is to deliver for the public good through excellence in education, research, and engagement with our local, national, and global communities. In manifesting its vision, 'knowledge leadership for a better world', UQ seeks to achieve global impact through the delivery of teaching, research, and engagement activities. Through a comprehensive range of activities, UQ delivers positive global development outcomes and translates world class research to bring solutions to global challenges.

In 2021, UQ confirmed its commitment to international development activity through the launch of an inaugural Global Development Impact Plan, establishment of a Global Development Hub, and inclusion of a renewed focus on development work within the University's strategic plan, *Toward 2032 UQ Strategic Plan 2022-2025*.¹ The plan encompasses a number of priority areas including UQ's commitment to advance the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and leverage UQ's development expertise to support capacity building in the Indo-Pacific region.

UQ's International Development unit has worked with a diverse range of funders and clients including the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to design and deliver a range of development projects utilising the expansive research, teaching and development capabilities of the University and its global network of partners and collaborators. UQ has been a major contributor to the Australia Awards program for both long-term scholars and the provision of short course awards programs throughout the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

In addition, UQ is contributing development expertise and the translation of its research through technical advisory services, long term development initiatives, regional engagement activities, program design and project management work. Examples include the Pacific Leadership Program for PNG; Australia Awards programs for Africa, South Asia and Mongolia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and PNG; Pacific Pathways: Towards 2032; Mekong Australia Program – Short Term Awards; ACIAR Learn and the Pacific Telecommunications Security Expert Forum. UQ has also provided research and advisory services spanning areas including gender, law and justice, minerals and resources, climate change, infrastructure, health, food security, agriculture, and governance and public policy.

General Comments re Proposed Approach to the New Development Policy

1. A focus on initiatives and activities that support the foundations for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region is seen as vitally important and a key objective of the new policy.
2. UQ endorses a focus on the Indo-Pacific region but strongly recommends other regions are not completely excluded from consideration given the global nature of development.
3. Localisation and partnered approaches are seen as vital by UQ. These approaches can be best achieved through early consultation, collaborative design with communities, countries and regions and engagement of local delivery partners providing increased contextualisation and improved likelihood for sustainability within projects and programs.

¹ <https://www.uq.edu.au/about/strategic-plan>

4. Collective, collaborative, and coordinated plans across regions and amongst funders need strengthening to maximise allocation of limited resources and leveraging existing and past activities to achieve greater impact.
5. UQ strongly supports a whole-of-government policy to generate greater coordination and consistency of approaches. Extending this to a 'whole-of-nation' approach by Australia in its engagement with the Indo-Pacific is recommended, an approach that includes drawing in the university sector, civil society, the private sector, media, and government.
6. UQ values the approach to include and recognise the contributions from First Nations communities in policy formulation and the design and delivery of development activities. It also endorses elevating the focus on important issues such as climate action, poverty reduction, human rights, and gender, equality, disability, and inclusion (GEDSI).
7. Access to world-class research and the translation of such research to better inform policy and implementation is seen as critical.
8. UQ supports strengthened public communications and access to the background and outcomes of all development activities to underpin greater transparency and effectiveness.

UQ Responses to Key Questions

1. What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?

Changing geopolitical circumstances and resulting tensions, climate change, rising poverty and long-lasting effects of the global pandemic are just some of the circumstances being faced across our region and globally. The pandemic directly impacted development with funding being redirected to COVID-19 recovery and this, together with several cuts to aid funding, has resulted in an overall depletion of aid funding available and a slowing or reversal of progress towards the achievement of global development goals.

Australia has an opportunity to realign its focus on true development areas such as peace and security; disaster risk reduction and management; strengthening of collaboration with government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society to build inclusive institutions and mechanisms of governance, and the capability enhancement of individuals within.

There are real opportunities to build strong development engagement through education, environment, health, agriculture, infrastructure, technology, and livelihoods to provide a stronger base for economic development and resilience. Targeting key issues of climate change and GEDSI should be embedded across all activity with an additional focus on entrepreneurship skills being built to support sustainability of initiatives. The University recognises the above areas as key priorities and areas will reflect shared mutual interest in the Indo-Pacific and beyond and directly contribute towards achievement of global sustainable development goals.

While UQ recognises the importance of the Indo-Pacific, Australia's aid program should not be limited to this region. While priority can, and should, be given to development activity in the Indo-Pacific, Australia's new policy should facilitate a global focus through effective collaboration with other global development funders, public and private. A broader positioning of Australia's development expertise, research and translation capabilities and networks, will be of value to other funders and can be used to leverage increased funding enabling expanded impact beyond the

2. What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?

UQ considers Australia to have extensive development capabilities across many sectors and organisations and acknowledges that some development capability may have been lost through the integration of AusAID into DFAT. The Department requires increased capability in bringing all development actors together in a strategic way and to be able to drive the whole-of-government/whole-of-nation approach.

The new aid policy will need to consider where requisite capacity can be rebuilt or drawn from. UQ would advocate for utilising broad ranging expertise from across Australia's robust university and research communities as well as drawing on the network of industry and NGOs with development expertise.

While discipline specific and technical skills will underpin development activities, expert project management and strong monitoring and evaluation capabilities are required. Harnessing and developing broader expertise in these areas, particularly people with practitioner experience will be critical to support the new policy and ensure effective implementation of policy and programs in an integrated way.

Systems and processes for identifying and engaging the appropriate capabilities supported by recognition and reward mechanisms, both within DFAT and the broader development sector will be required alongside organisational change and rebuilding within DFAT.

3. How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?

Australia's university sector and their networks of global partners from academia, government and industry provide a significant resource that can, and has been, used in the design and implementation of development programs. UQ, like many other Australian universities, has extensive programs of transdisciplinary research and teaching. The established networks and connections can be immediately accessed and applied to multi-dimensional challenges and used to map and secure existing and emerging opportunities. The University sector provides an alternative source of capability for evidence-based designs in development programs and the strengths of this sector and related industries across Australia should be engaged fully in the formulation and implementation of Australia's new aid policy and programs.

Universities provide a capability resource for the verification and/or challenging of existing assumptions; undertaking scoping studies and engaging the global community in program collaboration and accessing high quality data and research to inform decisions and plans.

Substantial benefit can be drawn from the work of the Australian Research Council and its identified science and research priority areas for challenges faced by Australia.² These priorities are relevant to key global development challenges and opportunities and harnessing synergies may fast-track access to expertise and research needed and expedite aid responses.

The proposed whole-of-government approach for the new aid policy is strongly supported by UQ to streamline departmental priorities, effectively use financial and other resources, and efficiently engage with stakeholders in the design and delivery of development projects. UQ recommends the whole-of-government approach be expanded to look at whole-of-region approaches to foster collaboration with other governments and funders in addressing shared challenges. Australia's reputation and stability stand it in good stead to lead on regional cooperation and support multi-donor or multi-country activities with the potential to broaden the scale of development work and its ensuring positive impact.

4. How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?

UQ strongly advocates for local engagement and genuine consultation with stakeholders to ensure development programs are built around understood and agreed needs, avoiding a "top-down" approach. Pursuing opportunities for co-design and co-delivery of initiatives will build trust and engagement with partners and a strengthened platform for future engagements.

During pandemic induced border closures, development programs were forced to rely heavily on local in-country partners and organisations. Their level of commitment and capabilities proved successful in many situations and there is now a solid base of active partners which can be engaged. Ensuring these connections are fostered and continue to be used builds deeper relationships and enhances trust for ongoing work and more sustainable projects.

There is a need to support certainty and consistency of approach to build long term trust and genuine partnership. Longer-term program planning and setting of development objectives should be prioritised over security and geo-political concerns to help build legitimacy with partners. Australia has long standing connections across the Indo-Pacific and beyond and we would encourage these existing platforms to be built on with Australia demonstrating the importance and value of those relationships in regional

² [Science and Research Priorities | Australian Research Council](#)

engagements. Australia must also ensure partnerships reflect First Nations peoples' involvement and approaches and ensure full GEDSI objectives are met. More consistent and phased long-term approaches to development with partnership and localisation at the core will bring greater engagement and real partnership to solutions.

Australia has a significant cohort of Australia Awards alumni globally. The alumni remain positive and committed to connection with Australia and many have risen to senior ranks within their government departments or organisations. There is enormous potential to leverage these enduring connections to add breadth and depth to partnerships at all levels. Alumni are seen to be change-agents for their countries and equipped with skills through their scholarship or short course programs, therefore, it is imperative they are a key consultation and engagement point in countries where Australia wants to engage.

Importantly, knowledge and learnings from our First Nations experts and localisation approaches need to be core to the new policy and future programming. Australia's increasing recognition of the value for First Nation expertise and knowledge will be valuable foundations on which to build and grow partnerships. Early and regular engagement with local communities in Indigenous peoples within developing countries will also bring critical insights and capabilities to ensure relevance of approaches that are fit for purpose in the countries and communities where Australia's development activities are delivered.

5. What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?

Australia's history of education provision through scholarship programs (long term scholarships and short-term awards) is highly valued and well regarded by counties in receipt of this development support. The programs build an ongoing platform of connection with Australia and long-lasting access to new partnerships and networks in scholar and awardee countries.

In countries or regions where there have been long term and ongoing scholarship and award programs, Australia has seen the benefit of having alumni move into senior and influential positions within the government, NGO, civil society, and industry sectors.

While Asian countries benefit from Australian government-funded scholarship programs, some countries have developed to a point where they have invested in their own scholarship and endowment funds. Australia could increase focus on engagement with these in-country scholarship bodies to secure additional scholars for Australia and expand connections from this broadened cohort of future leaders.

In contrast, the Pacific has not had the capacity or resources to establish its own scholarship funds and is still heavily reliant on Australian government funded places for study opportunities in Australia. This has resulted in a relatively smaller number of Pacific region scholars studying in Australia. To expand potential in this area, UQ recommends consideration be given to special arrangements for Australia Awards scholarships to the Pacific such as:

- extending Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP) access at Australian Universities to Pacific Island nations (in line with New Zealand Citizens) and
- the engagement of key industries to co-fund scholars to secure Australian trained personnel for emerging industries and priority sectors.

Retention of scholarship and award programs are key to this longer term and enduring connection for Australia and UQ advocates strongly for their continuation and expansion. Investigation of other scholarship models for specific countries, regions or sectors would be strongly recommended.

Countries with like-minded objectives in development, see Australia's connections and engagement in the Indo-Pacific as extremely strong and something to be emulated. UQ would recommend building on this reputation to facilitate specific development collaboration and potential access to expanded funding resources with countries seeking to invest in development in similar regions or sectors as Australia.

6. How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance?

UQ strongly advocates for a comprehensive public awareness building for aid and development and the benefits it brings to Australia, our region and globally. Consistent and regular public communications and more frequent profiling of successes to a broader public audience beyond those already connected to the aid ecosystem is needed.

Public awareness will help shape improved transparency and accountability frameworks to allow improved reporting and showcasing of outcomes.

UQ recommends all programs and investments clearly outline the following information:

- Objectives and expectations of all development initiatives
- Processes undertaken or to be undertaken for the design of programs
- Procurement processes and progress of steps to awarding of contracts
- Contracts awarded and full reporting on which organisation is delivering each initiative
- Clear and meaningful feedback throughout procurement and implementation stages of programs/projects
- Program reviews and reports – including monitoring and evaluation information

Increased and more consistent information sharing across the sector and with stakeholders and partners promotes transparency and creates the opportunity for learning and continual improvement in program design and delivery. This would also facilitate better connection between programs and investments and potentially create opportunities for expanded work or engagement of new partners and spreading of limited funds and resources.

Aid program delivery and performance could be enhanced with the provision of appropriate timelines and consistency of approach around collection and use of data plus a combination of individual feedback and broad long-term assessment of development outcomes over time. The provision of funds to support post initiative research on development outcomes or other longitudinal studies would increase transparency and the ability to demonstrate effectiveness.

An assessment of the effectiveness of large program facility arrangements or layers of project management via large managing contractors and various sub-contracts to bring in expertise requires further consideration with respect to effectiveness. While these arrangements may be seen to better manage risk for DFAT, they add administrative and cost burdens that may be removed if DFAT committed to flatter and more direct contracting structures.

Investing in technology and systems may provide solutions to open access and in-time reporting and information sharing to improve transparency and more consistent communications to all stakeholders.

7. How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?

While in favour of the whole of government approach to the new aid policy, there is potential for non-alignment of objectives and priorities between those responsible for ODA and non-ODA funds and programs. The new policy will need to frame planning and implementation mechanisms that enable the identification of aligned and common objectives and how objectives are prioritised (particularly focussed on ensuring development outcomes are not sacrificed for non-development funded objectives and vice versa). Procurement; implementation standards; reporting and transparency will need consistency and clear articulation of responsibilities and accountabilities.

The combining of ODA and non-ODA funds would expand access to resources and bring diversity of actors and strengths to activities. Carefully managed this would be seen as positive but without adequate frameworks and policy settings, it poses risks around incompatible objectives and ability to achieve intended outcomes. The new policy should address how these matters will be reconciled and how potential duplication and over-crowding of programs can be avoided.

Appendix 1 – Submission Contributors

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