



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

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Development Policy team
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Barton ACT 2600

By email: development.policy@dfat.gov.au

Call for submissions: new international development policy

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's new international development policy consultations.

The University of Sydney has a proud and long history (more than 100 years) of contributing to social and economic development in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, through our agriculture, veterinary science, health, education, law and business disciplines, as well as through our work in many other fields and multidisciplinary approaches. Our capacity building activities are typically pursued in partnership with other organisations and often made possible by Commonwealth funding support. We know they have improved community wellbeing and environmental sustainability in many developing countries, with significant social and economic benefits.

The challenges ahead for our region are significant in terms of biosecurity, food security, climate change, disaster response and management, defence and political instability. However, we know from our extensive development work that lifting educational attainment and building of local capacity through deep partnerships delivers long-term benefits for countries across the region, while also strengthening Australia's relationships with them and their peoples.

The University has historically educated many coursework and research students in public health and other fields on Colombo Plan and AusAID scholarships. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, we noted with concern, a fall in scholarships and international student mobility from the region, particularly in the health disciplines. This trend had reduced our ability to build capacity and strong regional relationships and partnerships. We are therefore encouraged by the news that the Australian Government offered more than 2,000 Australia Awards Scholarships and short courses in 2022, and will recommence the Australia Awards Fellowships following the program's suspension in 2019. We do, however, take this opportunity to strongly encourage the Government to increase its support for Australia Awards Scholarships in health and education for emerging leaders from countries in the Indo-Pacific.

In addition to the development work of our [School of Public Health](#), we have many other schools, centres and institutes that are pursuing strategies to strengthen our disciplinary excellence and expertise, and to encourage interdisciplinary approaches to development projects in the region.

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These include the:

- [Sydney Southeast Asia Centre \(SSEAC\)](#), including the [Sydney Vietnam Institute](#)
- [Sydney Infectious Diseases Institute](#), including the [WHO Collaborating Centre for Tuberculosis](#)
- [Centre for International Security Studies](#)
- [United States Studies Centre](#)
- [China Studies Centre](#)
- [Sydney Institute of Agriculture – Development agriculture](#)
- [Sydney School of Geosciences - research](#)
- [Sydney School of Veterinary Science - research](#)

Biosecurity and population health

The [Sydney Infectious Diseases Institute](#) is leading cross-disciplinary research in emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, and antimicrobial resistance - locally and globally. Due to rising rates of antimicrobial resistance, investigators from chemistry, biological sciences, medicine, geography, pharmacology, agriculture and veterinary science are helping to ensure the availability of effective antimicrobial therapies into the future. Further, the newly designated World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Tuberculosis ('[WHO Collaborating Centre for TB](#)') at the University will serve as a regional resource to reduce the global burden of TB, which remains the leading infectious disease killer on the planet.

Disaster Management

The [Sydney School of Geosciences](#) is a dynamic group of disciplines made up of geology, geography and geophysics, and tackles key issues facing society including climate change, resource management and sustainability. Academics' research spans the interface between the human and earth environments/sciences and endeavours to enhance community resilience; reduce losses from natural disasters, and develop appropriate disaster risk reduction strategies.

Professor Dale Dominey-Howes is an expert in hazard, risk, vulnerability and resilience assessment and has previously won funding to aid vulnerable communities in Southeast Asia to move from a reactive response to inevitable disasters to pre-planned management strategies. Prof Dominey-Howes is currently involved in a variety of research projects focusing on hazards and risk in Australasia, the Indo-Pacific region and further afield, in conjunction with members of his research group and international colleagues.

Animal health - infectious diseases and the veterinary workforce

Our [School of Veterinary Science](#) is internationally recognised as a leading provider of veterinary science education and a key contributor to world's best practice in the care and welfare of animals and the protection of human health. By way of example, Professor Navneet Dhand is the Director of [APCOVE](#), a consortium of more than 40 veterinary epidemiologists, established to strengthen field veterinary epidemiology capacity in the Asia-Pacific region.

Food security

In the Indo-Pacific, competing pressures on soil, water, nutrients, and space for agricultural production are only expected to increase as a result of population growth, economic development, and climate and environmental change. Achieving an optimal and sustainable level of food safety and animal welfare will not only require the application of new knowledge and technology, but innovation in partnership models and more effective collaboration between agribusiness, governments and universities. Over-

and-under-nutrition are endemic problems not only in our immediate region but across the globe, and agribusiness can help solve some of these problems. In recognition of these trends and the scale of the challenges, the [Sydney Institute of Agriculture](#) is pursuing strategies to strengthen our disciplinary excellence, sustain and build expertise, and encourage interdisciplinary approaches.

Our [Sydney Southeast Asia Centre](#) (SSEAC) oversees and coordinates our substantial expertise relevant to Southeast Asia, including the Indo-Pacific countries of Indonesia and Timor-Leste, and coordinates our extensive engagement with these countries. A list of current research being developed by SSEAC can be viewed at <https://www.sydney.edu.au/sydney-southeast-asia-centre/our-research/current-research.html>. Our Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences also manages a multidisciplinary approach to engagement with Cambodia through the [Angkor Research Program](#).

Several of our staff are involved in projects that contribute to Australia's overall development presence in the Indo-Pacific. The University currently has international development projects underway across mainland Southeast Asia, including in Myanmar, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Given that Australia has both a security and humanitarian interest in ensuring political, social and economic stability in the region, projects aimed at building skills, economic independence, and raising education standards will no doubt be in our national interest. Moreover, partnerships that deliver improved agricultural capacity and processes, and strengthen nutrition security, will contribute to economic development in the region, ensuring that sustainability is a core consideration in future economic growth.

We would like to see the new international development policy include the above target areas, in addition to the substance of our responses to the questions framed in the TOR, which are **attached** below. The University is a sponsor of the Australian Global Health Alliance (AGHA) and our [Office for Global Health](#) has been heavily involved in the development of AGHA's submission; which we strongly endorse. The University hosts four WHO Collaborating Centres and we are part of the Australian Network of WHO Collaborating Centres (ANWHOCC) which is also providing a submission.

If it would assist the Department, we would be delighted to make some of our experts available to discuss their research projects in the Indo-Pacific, and the key actions the Australian Government could take to further improve outcomes. If the Department requires anything further from the University of Sydney, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Tim Payne, Director, Higher Education Policy and Projects in my office in the first instance (tim.payne@sydney.edu.au, 02 9351 4750).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

Attachment: University of Sydney responses to the key questions contained in the Terms of Reference for the development of the new international development policy

University of Sydney responses to the key questions contained in the Terms of Reference for the development of the new international development policy

Q1 - 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?

- **Climate change and associated environmental change, increased risk of natural disaster, loss of livelihoods and social impacts**

Climate change poses one of the defining global challenges of the foreseeable future. The nature of Asia-Pacific geography, including many island-nations and vast populations living in coastal regions, means that any change in sea temperature or level will severely impact Australia and its neighbors. We have several researchers at the University of Sydney who work closely on climate change issues such as [Dr Sophie Webber](#) (urban resilience and countering negative impacts of climate change in Indonesia and Fiji), [Dr Aaron Opdyke](#) (natural disaster risk reduction in the Philippines) and [Prof Dale Dominey-Howes](#) (hazards, disasters and risk).

With an increase in weather-related natural disaster and impacts in low-lying and coastal areas across the Asia-Pacific, Australia's development assistance has an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to disaster risk-reduction and preparedness. This would, in turn, mitigate against large-scale displacement, economic shocks and support livelihoods in the region.

- **One Health**

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed faults in healthcare systems across the world, including in the Indo-Pacific. At the University of Sydney, our researchers are working across disciplines to develop insights and interventions based on the [One Health](#) approach - from within the Government's Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security - which sees health outcomes as intimately tied to the health of the environment, animals, crops (including food security) and lifestyle. This approach is most evident in the work of the [Sydney Vietnam Initiative](#) and the One Health Laboratory established with Hanoi Medical University (Vietnam). The Australian development assistance program has the potential to support holistic views of health and wellbeing that invite sustainable and targeted interventions with partner organisations in the Asia-Pacific. [Prof Greg Fox](#), [Dr Justin Beardsley](#) and [Prof David Guest](#) are some of our most active researchers in this space.

Specifically, infectious diseases (including antimicrobial resistance), future pandemics and disaster/rapid responses to emergencies will need more attention - not just in the context of the next pandemic but also for the infectious diseases (e.g. HIV and vector borne diseases) that have not disappeared during the pandemic. We diverted our global attention to COVID-19 and now need to revisit our focus on the pathogens that are still in existence in our region (e.g. tuberculosis). We need more capacity building in infectious diseases, diagnostics and surveillance so we can best respond to threats and existing problems. Our health workforce was enormously stretched during the pandemic and this exposed limitations in our region in the primary care 'coalface'.

- **Intensified inequalities**

Vulnerability based on gender, class, sexuality, and disability status are topics of concern and represent issues that the Australian Government should build their awareness on and seek to target. Development assistance programs that offer education, awareness raising and support for human rights and equality offer an opportunity to support interventions that can provide real impacts for the lived experiences of minority groups in the Indo-Pacific. Programs that seek to understand the experiences of these groups and work with them to address challenges to their safety and livelihoods could have a lasting impact on the region and promote Australia's reputation internationally. The

University has expertise in gender equality, work and labor rights through experts such as [Prof Michele Ford](#), [Assoc Prof Liz Hill](#) and [Prof Marion Baird](#). [Dr Russell Toth](#) also works on projects related to poverty and inequality, with a current project on Digital Financial Systems in Myanmar and Tanzania, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr Toth has undertaken projects in Indonesia, PNG and a range of other Indo-Pacific countries.

Q2 - What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?

Skills in research across a range of fields that incorporate disciplinary expertise and general skills such as critical thinking, data analysis and cross-cultural collaboration will be pivotal. The government should ensure it has technical skills in:

- risk mitigation, infrastructure development and emergency response
- geopolitical awareness and understanding, public diplomacy and relevant foreign languages
- project management, training/training of trainers and education/communication skills.

Specifically, we should build local capacity through a partnerships-based approach and increase skills in data sharing approaches and collaborative surveillance and pandemic treaties/accord.

• Digital record-keeping

The Pacific is a region of immense cultural diversity, including a quarter of the world's languages. Knowledge of languages is crucial for maintaining connection with other cultural practices including song and dance as well as maintenance of traditional knowledge including ecological knowledge. Cultural agencies in the Pacific provide a centralised place for the safekeeping of cultural knowledge, however, they face the significant issue of keeping the primary cultural and historical records of their collections safe from deterioration.

The University of Sydney is a partner in the [PARADISEC](#) archive, an internationally-recognised, award-winning digital archive that safeguards precious recordings in over 1,370 languages, and partners with cultural institutions throughout the Pacific. [Dr Amanda Harris](#) leads the Sydney PARADISEC lab team which has developed strong relationships with Pacific partners to make cultural heritage data available, provide storage of recordings vulnerable to climate-driven loss and to support return of cultural heritage materials to Indigenous speaker communities throughout Oceania.

• Female leadership

Seventy-five per cent of the global health workforce are female, however, only 25 per cent of leadership roles are held by women. We need to support and promote women's leadership across a range of disciplines; particularly in health where 90 per cent of women are in clinical-facing roles.

Q3 - How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?

Australia has faced numerous natural disasters over recent years and the lessons learned from mitigation and response, as well as rebuilding communities and boosting resilience, have strong potential to be useful in overseas development programs. In documenting the lessons we have learned and sharing experiences with political and technical counterparts in other countries, we can contribute to preparedness and risk reduction from climate change and health risks.

Australia has 0.03 per cent of the global population, however, our universities are world-leading with the ability to share our research, research training and educational leadership with the region. We have pedagogical approaches and curriculum development strengths that could be made available in partnership models. The networks that we are part of bring people together and we can supplement the "global north" approaches with a narrative shaped around decolonising global health.

Q4 - 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?

In the interests of working for mutual benefit, all government projects should start from strong foundational relationships with counterparts overseas. Working through university and/or education/training partnerships is one way to do this as universities such as the University of Sydney have long and enduring ties with education institutions across the Indo-Pacific. These relationships can provide an anchor for developing ongoing, long-term programs that are more difficult to sustain with the regular churn of diplomatic staff and managing contractors.

For example, the University of Sydney's collaboration in PARADISEC could support the development of "data embassies" for Pacific Island countries that would act as a safe store for their data, in Australia, governed by international conventions, and modelled on the UK National Archives' safeguarding of the digital archives of Ukraine. This would support cultural institutions throughout the Pacific, whose cultural heritage collections are vulnerable to increasingly volatile weather as a result of climate change.

The Government's commitment to human rights and equality should also come through in our development assistance program. Working with local partners, we can navigate complex political contexts to develop country/region-sensitive programs that bolster equality for marginalised groups. The Government has previously funded programs in Indonesia that focus on gender equality through working with local women's organisations (MAMPU). Working with organisations that share our vision but already have a deep embeddedness in local communities will provide a pathway for building stronger, more effective development programs.

Q7 - How should the new policy address the role of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?

As elucidated in the submission by the Australian Global Health Alliance, Australia needs to improve and expand existing funding mechanisms for global health funding with Official Development Assistance prioritising health funding. We believe that this should be extended to education funding as up to the onset of the pandemic we had noted a fall in scholarships and international student mobility from the region in recent years, particularly in the health disciplines.

Ends/