



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Barton ACT 2600

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

Call for submissions: new international development policy

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to Australia's new international development policy, which aims to drive the Government's international development efforts in support of security, stability, prosperity and resilience in the Indo-Pacific.

The University of Sydney has a proud and long history (more than 100 years) of contributing to social and economic development in Australia, 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. Our longstanding capacity building activities have improved community wellbeing and environmental sustainability in many developing countries with significant societal and economic impact.

We note that the challenges ahead for biosecurity, food security, climate change, disaster response and management, and political stability in the Indo-Pacific are significant. The University unreservedly endorses the attainment of education and generation of knowledge, and consequently, the value of systematic **investment in education** in realising long-term benefits for other countries. We have noted a fall in scholarships and international student mobility from the region in recent years, particularly in health disciplines. This has been detrimental in terms of our ability to build capacity and strong and lasting regional relationships and partnerships.

We therefore strongly encourage the Government to increase its support for Australia Awards scholarships in health and education for emerging leaders from Indo-Pacific countries. The University has historically educated many coursework and research students in public health (and other disciplines) on Colombo Plan and AusAID scholarships. The reciprocal benefits of these inclusion programs have been immeasurable, for example, within our Master of Global Health program, domestic students have learnt from the international students – often high-achieving individuals who work in the health systems in their local communities – as the exposure to their insight and experiences has greatly supplemented their theoretical grounding. Those international students have returned to their communities, usually into senior leadership positions due to their Australian postgraduate qualifications. They are then able to drive meaningful change through the development of robust health policies and programs. These outcomes all have a long-lasting development benefit in the Indo-Pacific.

In addition to the work of our [School of Public Health](#) teaching health education and research to Indo-Pacific nationals, 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 Indo-Pacific region.



These include the:

- [Marie Bashir Institute for Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity](#)
- [Sydney School of Geosciences](#)
- [Sydney School of Veterinary Science](#)
- [Sydney Institute of Agriculture](#)
- [Sydney Southeast Asia Centre \(SSEAC\)](#)

Biosecurity and population health

The Marie Bashir Institute for Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity is leading cross-disciplinary research in emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases across Australia and the Asia-Pacific. 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. One current project highly relevant to the Indo-Pacific is to identify new tuberculosis drugs from natural products.

Another of our academics - Professor Kristine Macartney from the Sydney Medical School - is an immunisation expert and as part of the Australian Regional Immunisation Alliance (ARIA), will be conducting regional consultation and analysis in low-coverage countries (Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands and other Pacific Island countries) to consolidate knowledge on immunisation coverage gaps and underlying factors and strengthening activities. ARIA experts will then collaboratively support implementation of selected tailored activities to improve immunisation coverage in target areas, ensuring integration with other infectious disease surveillance programs and broader health system strengthening, leveraging from planned new vaccine introduction-related activities.

Our public health academics and paediatric clinicians also support increased focus and funding for health research and testing interventions. This would enable health professionals to test models that have the potential to increase implementation and dissemination of evidence-based interventions in health care systems in Australia and our region. Our experts including Professor Louise Baur, Professor Mu Li, Professor Ben Marais and Professor Joel Negin have all either led health education and inclusion programs, or research on tuberculosis, perinatal health and nutrition, with partners in the Asia-Pacific. They note that research funding could be directed towards the rising prevalence of noncommunicable diseases in the Asia-Pacific region.

Their work complements that of colleagues like Professor Angus Dawson, Professor of Bioethics and Director of [Sydney Health Ethics](#), who has published widely on the ethics of public health. We cannot emphasise enough how research and action on health, public health, and whole-of-health systems must be central to the Government's chosen priorities of 'security, stability, prosperity and resilience in the Indo-Pacific'. While investment in education has long term benefits to countries and relationship building, nothing else is possible unless there is good population health.

Finally, on the current global health sector emergency response to COVID-19, other colleagues have recently made a breakthrough with government researchers by [obtaining a genetic sequence of the coronavirus](#) and [growing live samples for vaccine experimentation](#).



Disaster Management

The Sydney School of Geosciences is a dynamic group of disciplines made up of geology, geography, geophysics, marine and environmental science. The school tackles key issues facing society including climate change, resource management and sustainability. Academics involved in [Asia-Pacific Natural Hazards and Disaster Risk Research](#) are interested in a wide range of natural and technological hazards and their work spans the interface between the human and earth environments/sciences - exploring the characteristics of natural hazards (distributions, frequencies & magnitudes) and their impacts on people, communities and human systems.

The goals of their work are to:

1. enhance community resilience
2. reduce losses from natural disasters
3. develop appropriate disaster risk reduction strategies.

Professor Dale Dominey-Howes is an expert in Hazard and Disaster Risk Sciences 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. More recently, Professor Dominey-Howes has been sought out for commentary on the catastrophic bushfires on Australia's east coast.

In light of the current health security issues, we would also like to highlight Professor Adam Kamradt-Scott's recent research which examines civil-military cooperation in health and humanitarian crises, and has implications for Australia's capacity to respond to disease outbreaks such as COVID-19. Professor Kamradt-Scott is from the [Centre for International Security Studies](#), and specialises in global health security and international relations. His research and teaching explores how governments and multilateral organisations cooperate and interact when adverse health events such as disease outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics occur, as well as how they respond to emerging health and security challenges.

Animal health - infectious diseases and the veterinary workforce

Our School of Veterinary Science is recognised internationally 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 involved in a multi-university project to strengthen the veterinary workforce in Asia-Pacific for infectious disease detection and response. This project will build capacity of the animal health workforce in Asia-Pacific countries to detect and respond to disease outbreaks and control diseases impacting health security. The component led by Professor Dhand and this University, will (a) develop quality veterinary epidemiology eLearning training modules and case studies; (b) use these modules to train veterinarians in Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Philippines, PNG and Timor-Leste to increase the capacity of the animal health workforce to respond to disease threats; (c) organise workshops to improve the availability of skilled local facilitators and mentors; and (d) strengthen networks between existing field epidemiology training programs and institutions within and between countries.

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



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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.

For example, 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://sydney.edu.au/sydney-southeast-asia-centre/our-research.html>.

Several of our staff are involved in projects that contribute to Australia's overall development presence in the Indo-Pacific. In Indonesia and Timor-Leste, many of our relevant projects are concentrated in SSEAC's economic and social development cluster. The University also has a number of current international development projects across mainland Southeast Asia, including in Myanmar, 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, and have accordingly highlighted some areas of expertise and relevant projects we currently have underway. If it would assist the Department, we would be delighted to make some of our experts available to discuss the key factors for success and failure of development projects, 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,

(signature removed)

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