



ACADEMY OF  
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN AUSTRALIA

# Foreign Policy White Paper

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THE ACADEMY OF THE  
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Foreign Policy White Paper Taskforce  
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Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Foreign Policy White Paper.

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) promotes excellence in the social sciences in Australia and in their contribution to public policy. It coordinates the promotion of research, teaching and advice in the social sciences, promotes national and international scholarly cooperation across disciplines and sectors and provides advice to government on issues of national importance.

The Academy is an independent, interdisciplinary body of leading social scientists recognised for their distinguished contributions to the nation. Our vision is to enhance the quality, relevance and impact of social science research in Australia.

This submission focusses on the social benefits of international student movements. It has been informed by Australia's Comparative Advantage, a report prepared by the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) for Australia's Chief Scientist as part of the Securing Australia's Future Program. It can be found at

<http://acola.org.au/wp/PDF/SAF01/SAF01%20full%20lo%20res.pdf>

We will also touch on the important role and function of an international social science organisation, the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC).

To further discuss this proposal please contact Mr Murray Radcliffe of the Academy Secretariat on 02 6249 1788 or [murray.radcliffe@assa.edu.au](mailto:murray.radcliffe@assa.edu.au).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Diane Gibson  
Chair  
ASSA Policy and Advocacy Committee

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# Foreign Policy Whitepaper

## 1. International Students

The services sector dominates the Australian economy. In 2013, it accounted for close to 60% of Australia's GDP and for 78% of employment. Higher Education (HE) is very significant in terms of size and a very important part of the services sector that is a driver of economic growth based on research and development, innovation and high productivity with key inputs requiring highly educated and skilled workers.

The HE industry in Australia is highly regarded internationally for its quality and outcomes as evidenced by the ongoing inclusion of several Australian universities in the world's top 100 rankings.

The HE industry has great potential for further growth, but it also faces significant risks, including those related to reputation, quality of education, workforce sustainability, continued growth and contribution to the national economy. The right policy settings are essential to ensure the sector's continued success and to prevent any regress. Government will play a critical role in determining success through education sector funding and regulation, as well as through policy levers in other sectors which impact on higher education.

The education and training industry has grown year on year for the past 20 years and contributed \$67.976 million in GVA to Australian GDP, equivalent to 4.5% of total GDP in 2013. There were 563,000 full-time employed persons and 354,000 part-time employed persons in the industry (ABS 2014).

From 1986, Australian universities were permitted to accept international students and to set their fees. Rapid growth in international student numbers followed, as did the increasing value to the Australian economy and the reliance of the university sector on international fees to balance budgets in an increasingly constrained fiscal environment. New figures released by the Department of Education show there were 554,179 full-fee paying international students in Australia in 2016. This is an 11% increase on 2015. Government must do what it can to ensure the continuity of this positive trend.

International education is Australia's third largest export after iron ore and coal at an estimated \$19.7 billion in 2014-15 and has flow on effects across the economy. Clearly, the education industry is a source of Australia's comparative advantage, but this is neither inevitable nor permanent. Maintenance and enhancement of comparative advantage in a highly competitive global environment requires constant attention, as well as support from a conducive political and policy environment. To manage risks associated with Australia's reputation internationally, investment must be made in humanities and social sciences fields to ensure support of the technological opportunities created within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields. Almost 60% of Australia's international students are enrolled in the social sciences, compared to 25% in science, information technology, engineering and associated fields.

For Australia to fully realise its comparative advantage in education, universities in Australia must be comparable to the best universities in the world. To do this, universities must be adequately funded. Recent moves to reduce the proportion of the costs that Government will pay to educate students, forcing students to pay more themselves is unlikely to result in improved international comparisons.

A highly functioning telecommunications infrastructure will benefit all industries, and in particular, education. The Government has a critical role in ensuring that Australia has a competitive, fast and efficient telecommunications infrastructure and supporting policies.

The government's role in negotiating with other governments to reduce trade barriers will be essential to allow Australia to fully exploit its comparative advantage in education. The government funds and regulates the education sector, but also controls key policy levers related to immigration policy, student entry visas and post-study employment options. If Australia is to maintain its status as a highly competitive exporter of education, it is important that unnecessary barriers to the attraction of international students are eliminated. Changing political contexts in the United Kingdom and the USA is a potential opportunity for Australia, but the policy settings must be set to support that agenda.

## **2. Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC)**

Set up in 1973 to help promote the social sciences in the Asia-Pacific region and to recognise an Asian identity for the social sciences, AASSREC seeks to promote collaborative research among scholars in the region through the exchange of information among Asian social science institutions and individuals, and collaborative research between scholars from its member-countries.

AASSREC's regular activities include the conduct of biennial general conferences and the publication of conference papers and proceedings, the conduct of collaborative research programs on specific problems of common interest to Asia-Pacific countries, and the assessment of trends in social science research and teaching in the Asia-Pacific region.

Australia plays a pivotal role in this fourteen country association having provided its leadership and secretariat since 2006.

Hosted alternately by member-countries, AASSREC Biennial General Conferences, serve as a venue for the presentation of country papers, and the discussion of contemporary and relevant issues in the Asia Pacific region, the exchange of information on activities and programs, and shaping collaborative research undertakings among member institutions.

The conference usually features a chosen topic of regional importance in a main symposium, as well as side panel discussions or special lectures/meetings on other pertinent issues.

The Secretary General of AASSREC is Dr John Beaton, the Executive Director of the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences.