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# UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG
# OFFICIAL SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO
# NEW COLOMBO PLAN EXTERNAL ADVISORY GROUP

## 1 NOVEMBER 2024

The University of Wollongong (UOW) is proud to participate in the New Colombo Plan (NCP) and receive ongoing support to enable students to engage in life changing learning abroad experiences, whilst also creating and nurturing individual, institutional and national connection to the Indo-Pacific people and culture.

- **Do the current strategic objectives of the NCP meet the need for Australians to increase Indo-Pacific capability and literacy?**

NCP has had a significant impact on Australia's engagement with the Indo-Pacific region, supporting people-to-people links, understanding of and connection to the region. Students from diverse backgrounds, who otherwise would have not had the opportunity to gain awareness and first hand experiences of the region, have taken part in immersive experiences, connected to their fields of study. Universities have built academic partnerships across the region to foster deep connections.

UOW is a regional university, with high proportions of low socioeconomic, regional, rural and remote, first in family and indigenous students. The recent change to the minimum short term project duration for mobility programs and the short turnaround time to adjust projects has proven challenging. Previously run programs which were successful and popular, run in collaboration with well-established partner relationships, have not been included in this year's bid.

Initial student feedback has indicated that capacity to participate in 4+ week projects will be limited due to students' existing commitments to work, family and carer responsibilities. Missing part time work commitments reduces their income to support participation in the program, but also pay rent, utilities and general living expenses that continue while abroad.

Students' ability to financially self-fund participation in the program is also limited with initial indications that they are making more considered decisions regarding the take-up of student loans, including as OS-HELP, due to the indexation increase. The minimum length of a short-term mobility project has doubled, the minimum funding amount offered for such project has only seen a third (33%) increase.

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- **How can the NCP meet its primary objective of increasing Australia's Indo-Pacific capability while ensuring participants come from diverse backgrounds?**

A Hybrid Delivery Model would have an online component completed prior to travel, including engagement with the partner institution being core to its success. The hybrid model could also facilitate pre and post peer to peer engagement, across mobility projects and institutions. Cross project and institutional collaboration will support and nurture deeper and more meaningful connections across the program and create a stronger connection as an alumni. The immersive travel component would be shorter and would support the 4+ week minimum program duration, but not increase the financial cost and time commitment for students to participate face to-face.

The current NCP guidelines do not support a University collaborating with its offshore campuses. UOW is a truly international institution delivering world-class education programs at the University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD), Malaysia (UOW Malaysia KDU), Singapore (Singapore Institute of Management), Hong Kong (UOW College Hong Kong) and China (Central China Normal University) and now India. UOW ensures that we deliver high-quality education and research programs that enhance the capacity of the regions and communities in which we have a presence.

Allowing offshore campuses to collaborate on projects and grant opportunities will result in increased ability to meet the NCP strategic objective of increasing Australia's Indo-Pacific capability as well as support student diversity. Consideration could be given to how offshore campuses of Australian institutions could support projects in partnership with other Australian and Indo-Pacific institutions.

An Equity Placement Model would help make access to mobility projects fairer for under-represented groups. The model may hold a % of places (e.g. 10%) for students from these groups to help increase participation. A funding model to better support under-represented groups would also be well received.

An NCP designed marketing and communications toolkit that is available for all Universities to use. The toolkit could include alumni stories of students from underrepresented groups to create a sense of connection and ability for students to see themselves participating in the program.

Further advantages would be consistency in communications, branding, accessibility and messaging across the program as well as freeing up University staff time to work on identifying new projects, supporting underrepresented groups through the application process and increased quality submissions to meet the strategic objectives of the NCP.

Inclusion of postgraduate student eligibility would assist students who may not have previously had the supports around them to engage in mobility opportunities. It would also help to foster deeper academic connections, given the higher level of study.

- **How can the NCP help increase Asian language learning in Australia?**
  - Preparatory language training delivered by a third party, and potentially upon return from the immersive experience.
  - In-country language studies as non-credit to support students who would be willing to undertake language learning but are unable to undertake this for credit.

- **How can the long-term benefits of the program be rigorously assessed?**
  - Utilising academic research via NCP commissioned projects, including assessment of impact on participants, host institutions and organisations and the strength of associated relationships over time.

- **How can the program use its alumni network effectively (over 50,000) to build sustained interest in the region?**
  - Provide alumni with access to long term opportunities for engagement, continued education/ experiences and connection with the region.
  - Utilise alumni via a formal mentoring scheme, which could be country specific, to build expertise and long-term connection.

- **How can the NCP engage industry and support more private sector career pathways?**

UOW has a global network, strongly connected with industry, research partners, governments, communities and other Universities to ensure our programs are equipping graduates to be skilled to address society's critical economic, environmental, social and medical challenges.

UOW has existing partnerships and education programs that have requirement to participate in work integrated learning (for example: internships, work placements, co-curricular learning and recognition) that could be leveraged to create additional opportunities for connection to industry and career pathways.

Building a compulsory component or module into NCP projects illustrating to students the diverse career opportunities as well as how to communicate the benefits of participating in NCP projects for employability would be positively welcomed by students. Events and activities should be delivered to support this, e.g. career panel discussions.