

Submission on the Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040

The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission informing the priorities on the *Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* led by Australia's first Special Envoy for Southeast Asia, Nicholas Moore.

The ongoing importance and further deepening of education services in Southeast Asia is critical to continued growth of trade and investment nationally and also in our regional settings. We acknowledge the recognition of the important role that Australian regional universities play in Southeast Asia given our relevant expertise in providing education and research in partnership to meet the specific needs of regional communities. Our deep experience in delivering world class research and high-quality teaching and learning in regional footprints transforms communities and lives, locally and globally¹.

What is the value of your current and planned business with Southeast Asia (SEA)? Has this grown in recent years?

As a relatively young university, UniSC is continuing to build its engagement in Southeast Asia (SEA). Our strategic plan, *Rising with our regions; connecting with the world*², engages around the core business of study, research and partnership ensuring we are regionally beneficial and globally impactful. The financial value to the university of current SEA business has enjoyed steady growth from a modest base. A sample of current engagement has been provided below for context:

Student Mobility

- New Columbo Plan Scholars
- New Colombo Plan Student Mobility³

Student recruitment

- Modest international student recruitment, predominately from the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia, studying within business and health fields including nursing and social work. The COVID-19 pandemic and the heightened cost of living in Australia has led to a drop in the application pipeline of students from SEA. The university's international strategy includes a range of alternative study initiatives for 2023 including in-country pathways and an increase in transnational education and/ or blended delivery models.

Research engagement

- Forest Research Institute⁴ (e.g., Enhancing livelihoods through forest and landscape restoration in the Philippines)
- Centre for Bioinnovation⁵ (e.g., Developing technologies for giant grouper aquaculture⁶)
- Australia Centre for Pacific Islands Research⁷ project collaborators include a wide range of Southeast Asian university, government and industry partners including:
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade & Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Indonesia
Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC), Philippines
Guiuan Development Foundation Inc. (GDFI), Philippines
Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Region 8 (BFAR8), Philippines

¹ <https://www.usc.edu.au/about/our-rankings>

² <https://www.usc.edu.au/about/strategy-quality-and-planning/strategic-plan-2021-2024>

³ <https://www.usc.edu.au/study/life-at-unisc/study-overseas/short-term-programs>

⁴ <https://www.usc.edu.au/research/forest-research-institute>

⁵ <https://www.usc.edu.au/research/centre-for-bioinnovation>

⁶ The Centre's aquaculture study was awarded the 2020 Outstanding Published Paper in Aquatic Sciences by The Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development.

⁷ <https://www.usc.edu.au/research/australian-centre-for-pacific-islands-research>

Department of Agriculture – Bureau of Agricultural Research (DA-BAR), Philippines
Department of Science and Technology (DOST), Philippines
Philippines Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD)
Research Institute for Marine Fisheries, Vietnam
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam
Department of Science, Technology and Environment (DOSTE), Vietnam

Capacity building

- Centre for International Development, Social Entrepreneurship and Leadership (CIDSEL)⁸ programs in Indonesia, Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam.

UniSC's International Plan will see the university significantly expand its engagement in SEA in 2023 and would welcome collaboration with Government through relevant initiatives related to educational pathways, partnerships (including transnational education opportunities), research, global mobility and industry collaboration.

What do you see as the challenges and opportunities in Southeast Asian markets?

Challenges

Competition

Australia's position as a preferred destination in the region for international education is now being diminished with several East Asian destinations (China, South Korea and Japan) offering significant scholarships in large numbers. It is estimated that China offers 7,000 – 10,000 scholarships each year to SEA students through the Chinese Government Scholarship Program⁹ placing Australia in a non-competitive position. Australia will be required to respond to policy shifts of competitor nations and consider more comprehensive scholarship schemes or differentials involving sector consultation.

Affordability

In relation to international student recruitment the rise of cost of living in Australia will continue to have an impact on the ability of SEA students to undertake full degree programs in Australia. It is likely that the international education sector will need to pursue alternative models of delivery for some SEA countries. This may include increased transnational education initiatives, online product and in-country study hubs. In addition, accommodation availability and cost remain a challenge for many students. In UniSC's regions, like most others around the country, accommodation has become one of the main inhibitors to students accepting an offer. Therefore, through the lens of increasing access and opportunity, consideration should be given to the role that all levels of government can play, in collaboration with the sector and other stakeholders, to address this significant challenge.

Opportunities

Human capital

Southeast Asia's importance as more than an export market needs to be understood in the context of building human capital through education. A review of Australia's international education scholarship portfolio would be timely to understand the potential overlap of current programs such as the New Colombo Plan, Australia Awards and Destination Australia and how a focus could be better developed around Southeast Asia alongside the emerging Indo-Pacific focus. This could be considered in the light of moving toward a more comprehensive scholarship structure or portfolio which allowed for both regional attractors and merit-based scholarships aligned with creating the opportunity to build sustained international networks throughout SEA.

⁸ <https://www.usc.edu.au/community/usc-cidsel>

⁹ <https://www.campuschina.org/scholarships/index.html>

Sustainability

UniSC's campus footprint sits within three continuous UNESCO Biosphere Reserves¹⁰ housing learning areas for sustainable development under diverse ecological, social and economic contexts. This enables the university significant potential to engage and contribute to learning about sustainable development and for experimenting on mitigation and adaptation measures on climate change. Given that several of our Southeast Asian neighbours¹¹ (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam) have recognised biosphere reserves this also presents an area of future collaboration for UniSC.

What could government(s) do to make opportunities in Southeast Asia more attractive? How could the Australian Government practically help overcome obstacles faced?

In addition to the opportunities outlined above the following assistance would be useful:

- Bilateral agreements reducing financial and/ or regulatory burden on Australian higher education provision in SEA markets
- Enhanced 'brand Australia' messaging in relation to our competitive advantage to China, Japan, South Korea
- Targeted government scholarship programs for SEA countries
- Australian government SEA study hubs for the use Australian university partners
- Regional research capability alignment in areas of impact

What are the main trends and likely drivers of change in your industry to 2040?

Technology

The nature of education delivery was adjusted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and alternative modes of delivery became more available. This change will continue to adjust alongside technological enhancements including VR, AI, global connectivity and enhancements to remote access. Technology is likely to enable greater access especially for those in rural and remote areas but will require investment by universities to ensure the student facing product is fit for purpose.

Demographics

Changing global demographics, social mobility and the emerging middle class in SEA countries will see education participation rates continuing to rise, with particular reference to the growth industries of technology and health. The trend of current consumers of international education becoming our competitors in this space will continue and Australia will need to innovate in regard to product, delivery and value as our competitors invest in their own education systems as has been the case in China.

Reduction of unmet demand

As our competitor countries contribute to serving their own domestic markets and the international education market there will be a gradual reduction in unmet higher education demand from our traditional markets of China and India. The eventual reduction of these markets, though a longer-term challenge, requires Australia to commence strategic mitigation planning prior to 2040.

¹⁰ <https://www.usc.edu.au/about/unisc-news/news-archive/2022/november/only-place-in-the-world-with-three-biospheres-side-by-side>

¹¹ <https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/aspac>

How do you assess the overall level of Southeast Asia literacy in your institution, including on your board and/or among your senior managers?

As UniSC continues to expand its footprint and engagement in SEA it is also planning to increase its internal level of SEA literacy.

While there is some expertise in SEA among the university Council and the executive, there is limited literacy among the senior leadership team and among the university academic staff. As part of the university's commitment to SEA growth several strategies are in place to expand staff exposure to SEA including cultural competency training and opportunities for partnership engagement.

An opportunity for government would be to provide a program around SEA literacy for senior leaders in business and higher education.



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