

10

Diplomacy or development?

The final phase of activity that this book addresses covers the period from 2010 to 2018. Successive Australian governments wrestled with the role of scholarships, and indeed the purpose of aid more broadly over this period. Reviews were conducted into acknowledged areas of concern, especially in the case of a review of Papua New Guinean higher education. Where this period differs from others discussed in this book is the more overt use of scholarships as a tool of diplomacy. The connections between scholarships and diplomatic outcomes were especially clear in the case of the Australian Government's quest to gain a seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The focus on diplomatic outcomes of aid more broadly was also clear in the decision by the Abbott Government to integrate AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). This led to the loss of jobs, and expertise, in aid delivery and design and changed the way in which aid was viewed within and outside of the government. The changes made it difficult to retain development at the centre of the scholarship scheme, as they were then managed in conjunction with non-aid focused programs. Given the branding and name change that had been put in place by the Rudd/Gillard Government, moving from Australian Development Scholarships to Australia Awards, it was difficult for the focus on aid and development to be maintained, in perception or reality.

The Rudd Government put in train a number of the changes and reviews that started the decade, including efforts to gain a temporary seat on the UNSC. The shift of focus of the Abbott Government in 2013 had a greater impact on the progress and implementation of development scholarships, as discussed later in this chapter. In a shift from the previous decade, there was little policy focus on scholarships, as policy and political attention was

drawn to a new outbound scholarships scheme, the New Colombo Plan. This was a favourite project of the Foreign Minister from 2013 to 2018, Julie Bishop. This, along with a shift to a more private sector-oriented aid program, left the Australia Awards vulnerable and they suffered the same budget cuts that the Abbott and Turnbull governments wrung out of the aid program.

Meanwhile, from an Australian Government perspective, 2010 to 2018 in the Pacific was a period of relative political calm. The security focus that had characterised Australia's engagement over the 2000s slowly dissipated. While the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) continued, the focus of the Australian Government drifted elsewhere. The Australian political situation over the same period became tempestuous; between 2010 and 2018 Australia had five separate prime ministers, with one, Kevin Rudd, serving twice. The period in domestic Australian politics was marked by leadership spills, leaking, policy changes and instability.

Some elements of the recommendations that had been articulated by Margaret Gosling in 2008 (as outlined in the previous chapter) were implemented by the Rudd/Gillard/Rudd governments between 2007 and 2013. The scholarships were consolidated, in part, under the umbrella term of Australia Awards. But, as with much of the activity of the time, this was a stylistic change, not a substantive one. While Australian Government international scholarships were all now known as Australia Awards, they were each still their own separate programs. This caused significant confusion, given the vast differences in processes, designs and goals of these awards. For example, the Endeavour Awards became known as the Australia Awards Endeavour. These awards were run by the Department of Education and had a significantly different remit to the Australia Awards (development).¹ The Endeavour Awards were focused on academic excellence and offered both inbound and outbound scholarships.

The Australia Awards (AA) of the development kind were expanded quite substantially with this new branding. Two new, multinational programs were introduced: Australia Awards Africa and Australia Awards Latin America. The Latin America program was almost entirely focused on fellowships, but the AA Africa was more in line with other AA programs.

1 For an excellent brief history of the Endeavour Awards, see Kent Anderson and Joanne Barker, 'Vale Endeavour, Long Live the New Endeavour: The End of Australia's World Leading Commitment to Internationalism and the Opportunity to Reassert Ourselves', *Australian Policy History*, 28 May 2019, aph.org.au/2019/05/vale-endeavour/, accessed 20 April 2023.

The introduction of the AA Africa program was an enormous undertaking covering nations across the continent, involving a significant logistical and funding investment to establish.

These two new programs, largely de-linked from the broader bilateral or existing multilateral aid programs that existed in those regions, were implemented in the service of a larger goal that serves to highlight the role of scholarships as a diplomatic tool. They were created to demonstrate the generosity of the Rudd Government rather than out of a need for an investment of Australian aid in the recipient nations. Scholarships were as malleable as they have been over the decades covered by this book, used for a multitude of purposes by even a single actor – in this case, an investment in gaining votes at the UN.

The AA Africa and AA Latin America scholarships were part of an ambitious attempt by Kevin Rudd and his government to gain election to one of the rotating seats of the UNSC. As this position is elected by the General Assembly of the UN, Australian diplomats were tasked with gaining the support of a majority of nations within the UN. This effort coincided with a significant expansion of Australian aid,² and the introduction of the AA program into geographic areas where Australian aid was not normally focused, namely Africa and Latin America. There were reasonable rationales for Australia to engage with Africa in particular. In a report prepared as part of an Aid Effectiveness Review in 2011 by academics Joel Negin and Glen Denning, they noted that there was a need for aid, but also, ‘a strong commercial rationale exists for engaging with Africa’.³ Negin and Denning acknowledged that the number of countries in Africa, and Rudd’s stated commitment to cementing Australia’s position as a middle power, necessitate ‘active relationships with African nations. This may include, but is not limited to, efforts to secure a United Nations (UN) Security Council seat’.⁴

Negin and Denning’s report noted that scholarships formed the largest component of Australia’s aid to Africa, but the scholarships offered opportunities for Australians to learn more about Africa. They outlined the risks of the large program, the rapid ramp up and the amount of human

2 Joel Negin and Glen Denning, *Study of Australia’s Approach to Aid in Africa: Commissioned Study as part of the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2011).

3 Negin and Denning, *Study of Australia’s Approach to Aid in Africa*, 4.

4 Negin and Denning, *Study of Australia’s Approach to Aid in Africa*, 4.

resources required to undertake the expansion.⁵ The risk that was not addressed by the report was the reputational risk the Australian Government took on by expanding a program quickly, and then reducing it quickly just a few years later.

And while the focus on Africa was not clearly related to the provision of scholarships to the Pacific, what the massive new scholarship component did was divert attention from all other scholarship country programs, as a huge and multinational scholarship program was designed and implemented. The first iteration of the AA involved 27 countries across Africa. The program was run from a central office in Pretoria, South Africa, but involved promotion, coordination of applications, shortlisting, interviews, selection and pre-departure briefing across a huge number of national contexts. This required huge resources, financial and human, in a short period of time. This diversion of attention to Africa also highlighted to all of Australia's other bilateral partners, including those in the Pacific, that one of the most important aspects to Australia's aid provision at the time was a seat at the UNSC.

Australia was elected to a two-year term on the UNSC, commencing on 1 January 2013. In September of that year the Abbott-led Coalition Government was elected in Australia, changing the trajectory of Australian aid, and the AA scholarship program.

In one of its first major moves,⁶ the Abbott Government announced that AusAID was to be closed, and its functions moved into DFAT. This surprise move was a shock to the aid community. Scholar Jack Corbett wrote that those within AusAID, even Coalition insiders, were shocked by the decision.⁷ It was more than just moving the aid program into DFAT – different elements of the aid program were themselves split across DFAT. According to Corbett, it was 'difficult to imagine how the administration of the aid program could have been more thoroughly dismantled'.⁸ These significant administrative moves were coupled with significant cuts to staffing levels, and cuts to program funding over several budgets. It also signalled very clearly to the Australian and international community that the Abbott Government saw aid very clearly as a tool of diplomacy, firmly

5 Negin and Denning, *Study of Australia's Approach to Aid in Africa*, 26.

6 The decision was announced on the same day that Tony Abbott was sworn in as prime minister.

7 Jack Corbett, *Australia's Foreign Aid Dilemma: Humanitarian Aspirations Confront Democratic Legitimacy*, Routledge Humanitarian Studies (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), doi.org/10.4324/9781315523491.

8 Corbett, *Australia's Foreign Aid Dilemma*, 136.

part of Australia's foreign policy, with the Australian-centric focus that came with that. Given the Australian focus on scholarship programs, not only the name of the scheme but the way in which much of the benefit flowed to Australian institutions and individuals,⁹ this signal was relevant in the context of scholarships.

The cuts to the budget that the Abbott Government introduced impacted on scholarship numbers across the world, but owing to the manner in which scholarship programs are implemented and the long lead time for students to arrive in Australia, these cuts were not obvious until 2015. In 2016 the impact was clear, with 1,000 fewer scholarships offered that year than were offered in 2014. The reduction was not even across the world, with the AA Africa program suffering enormous cuts and the program shrinking its reach across the African continent. Numbers in the Pacific were reduced by over 80 awards. This was a significant cut in the context of the numbers offered in the Pacific, at the time just under 300 long-term awards.¹⁰

While there was a sudden and dramatic drop in the number of awards in the years following the election of the Abbott Government, the number of awards increased year on year from 2016. Scholarships became a little more politically popular, easily coopted into the new aid outlook promoted by Foreign Minister Julie Bishop that was focused on developing the private sector and encouraging economic growth, with 'promoting prosperity' coming first in the aid tagline, ahead of reducing poverty and enhancing stability.¹¹

In addition to the push to gain a seat on the UNSC, and in line with the reforming zeal of the early years of the Rudd Government, a review of Papua New Guinea (PNG) universities was commissioned. The review was part of a frenetic round of reviews and policy ideas that characterised the first iteration of the Rudd prime ministership and was commissioned by Rudd and PNG Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare. The report was handed down in 2010. The review was conducted by Professor Ross Garnaut and Sir Rabbie Namaliu. Garnaut and Namaliu were both distinguished academics and public sector experts. Namaliu also had a long career as a

9 Scholarships include fees paid to educational institutions and stipends spent largely in Australia. The benefit of the education is felt by the individual and the recipient nation, but much of the immediate financial benefit is experienced by Australian organisations.

10 Austrade, ed., *Australia Awards Data (2002–2018)* (Canberra: Australian Trade Commission, 2018).

11 Corbett, *Australia's Foreign Aid Dilemma*; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australian Aid: Promoting Prosperity, Reducing Poverty, Enhancing Stability* (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014).

politician including a period as prime minister of PNG and was also the first Papua New Guinean graduate to be appointed to the academic staff at the University of PNG.

Garnaut and Namaliu were asked to:

review the condition of the Papua New Guinea Universities, to assess whether they were performing the roles required of them in Papua New Guinea development and to make recommendations on steps that could be taken to strengthen their contributions.¹²

The report was effusive about the contribution of PNG universities to the development of PNG in the lead-up to, and soon after, independence. According to Garnaut and Namaliu, 'students in that first generation played leading roles in dismantling the institutionalised racial discrimination that had been a feature of life in the territories of Papua and New Guinea'.¹³

The report was commissioned as part of an effort to address the growing critical skill gaps in PNG, such as the number of trained teachers, health professionals and workers in the resources sector. The authors noted that over the decade prior to the report, aid to PNG had been shifted from budget support to project aid, altering the way in which the country was able to manage aid inflows. This had impacted on the manner in which universities had been funded and reduced the ability for the Papua New Guinean Government to allocate funds where it saw fit.

Garnaut and Namaliu found that the university sector in PNG, as it was in 2010, would not be able to address these skill gaps. The report was highly critical of the standards, funding and provision of university-level education in PNG, they wrote that they 'have reluctantly come to the conclusion that a high proportion of the courses in Papua New Guinea State universities are not taught at an adequate standard'.¹⁴ They explained that these low standards came from quality control, a lack of funding, governance and ethical failures and pressure to expand numbers, among other reasons. The report's authors made recommendations relating to all of these issues, including how Australian aid should be used to support PNG universities. The authors recommended the introduction of an income-contingent loans system, similar to the Australian Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS),

12 Ross Garnaut and Rabbie Namaliu, *PNG Universities Review: Report to Prime Ministers Somare and Rudd* (Canberra: AusAID, 2010), 6.

13 Garnaut and Namaliu, *PNG Universities Review*, 7.

14 Garnaut and Namaliu, *PNG Universities Review*, 12.

twinning arrangements with Australian universities, and other support mechanisms.¹⁵ Garnaut and Namaliu suggested that these commitments be made in addition to the continuing scholarship program. However, they suggested that the existing scholarships be reoriented to support university development: ‘we suggest that the scholarships allocations be concentrated on training of staff and potential staff members of universities and research institutions, mostly at PhD and some at Master’s level’.¹⁶

The report recognised that these scholarships represented a key tool for demonstrating, both in the source country (PNG) and the donor country (Australia), what was important. If the scholarships had been reoriented to support the higher education sector, that would have been a clear indication that Australia was deeply invested in developing a high-quality higher education sector in PNG. Unfortunately, like much of the reformative zeal of the Rudd Government, the review served more as a snapshot in time than as a comprehensive blueprint for development within the PNG universities sector. Despite it containing significant substance, there were limited outcomes from the report for scholarships.

Over the period beginning in 2010 there was a large increase in the number of international students coming to Australia. This came after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, the collapse of a number of private providers and a number of racially motivated attacks on students had led to a reduction in the number of students coming to Australia.¹⁷ Students sponsored by the Australian Government were only a tiny percentage of the overall number of students.¹⁸ As discussed earlier, the number of Australia Award Scholarships from 2010 to 2018 fluctuated, the highest being 2,112 in 2013, and the lowest being 971 awards in 2016.¹⁹ These high and low points correlate with the expansion of the AA into Africa and Latin America, and the rapid reduction in awards after the election of the Abbott Government in 2013 (as discussed). In contrast, the number of awards offered in Pacific Island countries was relatively consistent, albeit at a fairly low level, reaching a high of 303 in 2011 and a low of 201 in 2016.

15 Garnaut and Namaliu, *PNG Universities Review*, 56.

16 Garnaut and Namaliu, *PNG Universities Review*, 57.

17 For an assessment of the issues raised during this period see Michael Wesley, ‘Australia’s Poisoned Alumni: International Education and the Costs to Australia’, Policy Brief (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2009).

18 In 2010, according to Austrade data, there were around 444,000 international students in Australia. In 2018 that figure was nearly 640,000.

19 Austrade, *Australia Awards Data*.

Table 10.1: Australia Award Scholarships in the Pacific

Pacific Island countries (recipients)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Cook Islands	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Fiji	16	44	41	38	46	43	7	34	47
French Polynesia	2	4	3	3	4	5	–	–	–
Kiribati	4	9	9	8	10	12	13	19	19
Marshall Islands	1	–	2	1	–	–	–	–	–
Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	–	1	–	1	1	1	–	–	–
Nauru	1	–	–	–	3	5	4	5	7
New Caledonia	6	4	4	4	4	12	1	–	–
Niue	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Papua New Guinea	135	174	152	158	154	147	137	103	87
Samoa	14	15	23	24	19	21	13	20	29
Solomon Islands	17	29	29	29	25	22	16	18	26
Tuvalu	4	4	6	6	4	7	3	3	6
Vanuatu	17	16	22	24	12	12	7	12	11
Wallis and Futuna	–	3	–	2	1	–	–	–	–
Grand total per year	219	303	291	298	283	287	201	214	232

Source: Austrade, ed., *Australia Awards Data (2002–2018)* (Canberra: Australian Trade Commission, 2018).

The figures in Table 10.1 are only for students who were awarded scholarships to study in Australia. As was shown in the last chapter, a large number of scholarships are allocated for Pacific students to study in Pacific universities. The Australia Regional Development Scholarships were also part of the rebranding or consolidation that occurred in 2010, and they became known as the Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships.

These numbers do not tell the reader anything about the success of the individuals who made up the numbers, or the impact those individuals were able to have after they completed their studies. In this way numbers can be a misleading way in which to understand scholarship programs, as designers often expect an outsized impact in relation to the number of awards on offer.²⁰ This period can be particularly misleading if one is to measure

20 The South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme is a good example of this issue, with six awards expected to help repair Australia's reputation in South-East Asia in the early 1950s. The expectation is not entirely unfounded – advertising the availability of a scholarship will positively engage a much higher number of people than there are awards available.

it on numbers, given that one of the significant areas of growth during this decade was in short courses. These short courses allowed for a greater number of ‘awardees’ to be counted, despite the experiences of a PhD or Masters student not being comparable to that of a short course awardee. Again, however, the numbers were part of a broader public diplomacy engagement that was increasingly important to DFAT (under both Labor and Coalition governments), often at the cost of long-lasting or deeper impact. The longer-term outcomes of the switch to shorter programs will take years to be understood.

There was, during this period, some evidence that the scholarships did have development outcomes. An Australian National Audit Office audit in 2010 found that scholarships made a ‘tangible contribution to improving tertiary training outcomes, particularly in the Pacific region’.²¹ The report did criticise the unpredictability of aid levels in the Pacific region in particular, reflecting the inconsistent numbers of awards being offered each year. The report also highlighted that these scholarships, and other tertiary training support in the Pacific region that made up 60 per cent of the education spending, ‘has come from initiatives that are not integrated with the budgets and policies of recipient country governments’.²² The failure to fully integrate scholarships into the policies of recipient governments was a criticism first levelled at the Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (EMSS) in the late 1980s. That it was raised in yet another review nearly 20 years later highlights both the difficulty of integrating scholarships into broader bilateral aid programs, and the desire of successive Australian governments to retain significant control over the scholarship program. It also, again, returns us to the reality that the scholarship programs reflect Australian policy more than they reflect the priorities of the recipients. This includes deciding who the awardees are and what they study, because the scholarship program has purposes and motivations other than aid. The auditors of 2010 clearly understood the multiple motivations behind scholarships, noting that:

[the] global focus of scholarships to study in Australia reflects, in part, the role they play in Australia’s foreign policy agenda, including their role in improving people-to-people links between Australia and its partners.²³

21 Auditor General, ed., *AusAID’s Management of Tertiary Training Assistance* (Canberra: Australian National Audit Office, 2010), 14.

22 Auditor General, *AusAID’s Management of Tertiary Training Assistance*, 16.

23 Auditor General, *AusAID’s Management of Tertiary Training Assistance*, 18.

The auditors noted that Australian alumni filled senior positions in Indonesia, Fiji and PNG and this was helpful for Australian politicians and diplomats. The move of the aid program into DFAT only served to highlight and entrench these foreign policy goals within the scholarship program.

Despite the significant cuts to aid and scholarships implemented by the Abbott Government, one new scholarship program was able to gain traction and broad support. The New Colombo Plan was championed by Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who created the program in an effort to encourage Australian students to travel to the Indo-Pacific region.²⁴ Using the Colombo Plan name was an attempt to borrow from the existing goodwill that had been developed from the original plan in the region that the new plan was focused on. As has been noted in earlier chapters, the Colombo Plan continued to influence policymakers across the decades, and this was continuing into the new millennium.

The New Colombo Plan was largely mobility grant funding, provided to universities who were able to subsidise the cost of student mobility programs such as study tours. A small number of students were able to study on longer-term scholarships, undertaking a semester abroad. These awards were designed, like many of the scholarship programs discussed in this book, to have a much larger impact than the numbers involved might imply. The promotion of the program was huge and encouraged the sense that thousands of students were having transformative experiences in Asia and the Pacific. The program did increase the number of students able to experience study abroad during their universities studies, but recent research by Agnieszka Sobocinska and Jemma Purdey found that the New Colombo Plan study tour model ‘facilitate a short-term period of emotional involvement and self-reflection, rather than forging enduring connections’.²⁵ This is in contrast with the long-lasting connections that the Colombo Plan created, and the name New Colombo Plan was intended to evoke. The New Colombo Plan was also focused on business and corporate outcomes, with a significant focus on internships, which was in line with the private sector focus that had dominated aid design and implementation under the Abbott Government.

24 The term Indo-Pacific was favoured by Bishop, widening Australia’s area of ‘interest’ from the Asia Pacific to include the Indian Ocean and the nations that border that ocean, including East Africa and South Asia.

25 Agnieszka Sobocinska and Jemma Purdey, ‘Enduring Connections?’, *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 175, no. 2–3 (2019): 225, doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17502001.

Like most of the scholarship and education programs discussed in this book, the design of the New Colombo Plan was not targeted at Pacific countries; the focus remained on East and South-East Asia. Nevertheless, the 2015 iteration included Pacific-based projects and mobility grants.²⁶ In 2018 the top four destination countries for New Colombo Plan scholarship students were Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and China. No Pacific nations featured in the top five destinations for mobility grant funding.²⁷ While the program was not designed around engagement with Pacific nations, the use of the ‘catch-all’ term Indo-Pacific did allow for Pacific nations to participate. The term is far more inclusive than the ‘Asiabound’ terminology of the Gillard Government, but the fact that the Pacific does not have the Colombo Plan as part of its history with Australia does demonstrate that the scheme was, at the very least, named without thought of the Pacific. Communities of the Pacific had none of the familiar associations with the Colombo Plan that were present in South-East Asia.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, during this rebranding of the Australian Development Scholarships to the Australia Awards, the Australian Regional Development Scholarships were renamed the Australia Awards Pacific Scholarships. These continued despite the cuts to aid and scholarships. Some more significant changes were made to some country programs; in PNG, the scholarship design was amended to include a significant number of in-PNG awards, largely for undergraduate study. These scholarships, which continue today, have been targeted to particular sectors such as nursing and midwifery. This scholarship uses a similar rationale to that of the Pacific scholarships, as described in the previous chapter, whereby students were encouraged to use the in-PNG award to complete undergraduate study and the in-Australia awards for postgraduate study. This indirect injection of Australian aid through fees and other supports also helped to meet some of the recommendations of the review of PNG universities completed in 2011.

In 2017 the Turnbull Government launched the Australia Awards Women’s Leadership Initiative, with funding of \$5.4 million over five years (2017–2022).²⁸ This was announced after another women’s leadership program for

26 ‘2015 Mobility Program Offers’, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/mobility-program/Pages/2015-mobility-program-offers, accessed 20 April 2023.

27 Ly Thi Tran and Mark Rahimi, *New Colombo Plan: A Review of Research and Implications for Practice*, Research Digest 14 (Melbourne: International Education Association of Australia, 2018), 8.

28 Julie Bishop, ‘Speech at the Launch of the Australia Awards Women’s Leadership Initiative’, 8 February 2018, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Canberra, www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/julie-bishop/speech/speech-launch-australia-awards-womens-leadership-initiative, accessed 24 April 2023.

the Pacific, the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, was announced in 2012. The Pacific Women's program was far broader, with a significantly larger remit and budget of \$320 million over 10 years.

The Australia Awards Women's Leadership Initiative was designed as an 'on-award' enhancement for Pacific students, an experience while they are in Australia. This initiative was part of a broader trend within the AA program more broadly to focus on 'on-award enrichment'. This emphasis saw a significant focus on providing extracurricular activities, such as the Women's Leadership Initiative, for Australia Award scholars while they were in Australia. These activities were often designed to support a particular cohort of students (i.e. those studying in a particular sector), but were often limited by country. These programs help to demonstrate some of the ways in which the scholarship program has changed in the decades since the EMSS.

In the design of the EMSS in the late 1980s, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee International Development Program (IDP) was contracted to support the implementation of the program. By 2018 nearly all of the AA country programs were managed by third parties known as managing contractors. These companies bid for the contracts to run the programs, with each contractor taking a slightly different approach to the way in which the scholarship program was managed, within the overall parameters set by DFAT. This is how the designers of the EMSS envisaged their scholarship program evolving, but just as the granting of decision-making power to the Australian diplomatic posts created tensions and uneven delivery, so did the involvement of managing contractors.

In this structure, students of the Pacific were disadvantaged. Apart from the Women's Leadership Initiative, there were few on-award enrichment activities available to students from the Pacific (outside of PNG). This is in large part because the AA programs in the Pacific were smaller, and it was less cost-effective for the managing contractors to include on-award enrichment as part of their programs.

This serves to highlight the continued uneven application of the scholarship program across countries. This had positive and negative consequences. It allowed for individual countries to tailor aspects of the scholarship program to suit individual country needs, as highlighted in the EMSS example. But for students from the countries of the Pacific, it meant that their access to extension activities was limited.

One additional program introduced during the period covered by this chapter aimed to identify and quantify the benefits of the awards investigated by this book: the Global Tracer Facility. This Facility was tasked with identifying contributions to development from the AA. They also assessed the contribution to Australia's 'economic diplomacy' from these scholarships. While the remit of the Tracer Facility was stated as tracing AA students, in reality staffers have traced alumni from a raft of the scholarship schemes discussed in this book, including the Colombo Plan, the EMSS and the Australian Development Scholarships. The Tracer Facility staffers have used a number of methods to approach the large project, including methods more common to market research. The reports produced by the Tracer Facility have covered a number of specific areas across a number of countries and regions (for example, one report focuses on alumni from Fiji over several decades who studied education-related courses).

The existence of the Tracer Facility, and its reporting, have provided successive Australian governments (both the Turnbull and Morrison governments), and specifically DFAT, with significant evidence to support the continued investment in scholarships. The reports point to positive outcomes in development and positive outcomes for Australia.²⁹

The outcomes that the Tracer Facility sought to measure are indicative of what the Australian Government wanted from the investment in scholarships:

Outcome 1: Alumni are using their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development.

Outcome 2: Alumni are contributing to cooperation between Australia and partner countries.

Outcome 3: Effective, mutually advantageous partnerships between institutions and businesses in Australia and partner countries.

Outcome 4: Alumni view Australia, Australians and Australian expertise positively.³⁰

29 Australian Council for Education Research, 'Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility – Case Study #1: Fiji', (Melbourne: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017).

30 *Global Impact of Australian Aid Scholarships: Long-term Outcomes of Alumni*, Australian Council for Education Research, www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/global-impact-australian-aid-scholarships-long-term-outcomes-alumni.pdf, accessed 20 April 2023.

It is difficult to avoid the fact that three of the four desired outcomes are focused on positive outcomes for Australia, either cooperation between Australia and the partner countries, or that alumni view Australia in a positive light. This approach to a program that is, at its core, a foreign aid program represents the view that Jackson put forward in his 1984 report: Australian foreign aid needed to be, foremost, in Australia's national interest. This was also the view of the Howard Government, which put national interest at the forefront of its aid rationale. In provisioning the scholarships, successive Australian governments have been able to focus on the short-term positive outcomes for the recipient nations – scholarships are, after all, extraordinarily popular with recipient nation governments³¹ – while the longer-term outcomes that politicians and public servants were interested in are far more focused on Australia. Evidence has been produced by the Tracer Facility that points to the beneficial outcomes of the scholarships to nations, communities and individuals, but the core thrust of the work of the Facility, judging by the measures they used, is how the scholarships can be used to demonstrate outcomes for Australia. In this, the Tracer Facility fits into the broader narrative of Australian Government scholarships over time. They are far more a reflection of Australia and Australian policies than they are a reflection of the needs of the recipient nations and individuals.³²

As Australian Government scholarships continued into the second decade of the twenty-first century they were first ramped up with new programs and additional funding implemented by the Rudd and then Gillard governments, then pulled back with cuts that were made by the Abbott Government to scholarships and aid more generally. At the beginning of the decade, Jackson's 1984 10,000 scholarship proposal was close to being achieved. In fact, the proposal was that there would be 19,000 scholarships per year. While this may well have involved some creative counting, including short-term awards and fellowships, the ambition was striking. Scholarships formed the majority of Australia's aid to a number of nations, and Africa as

31 This has been recently proven, once again, by a request by the prime minister of PNG, James Marape, requesting a new secondary school scholarship program be put in place by Australia for PNG students. The new scheme was due to commence in mid-2020 but was affected by the pandemic.

32 This also applies to broader aid decisions. Research into the motivations of donor countries often points to donor considerations taking prime position when it comes to allocation decisions. See Rukmani Gounder, 'Empirical Results of Aid Motivations: Australia's Bilateral Aid Program', *World Development* 22, no. 1 (1994): 99–113, doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(94)90171-6, and Charles Hawksley, 'Australia's Aid Diplomacy and the Pacific Islands: Change and Continuity in Middle Power Foreign Policy', *Global Change, Peace & Security* 21, no. 1 (2009): 115–30, doi.org/10.1080/14781150802659473, among others.

a continent. The rebranding of the Australian Development Scholarships into the Australia Awards created the next scholarship to follow the line that began with the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme in 1948.

With the election of the Abbott Government in 2013 there were cuts in aid, staff and ambitions for scholarships. The numbers plummeted to a low of less than 1,000 scholarships in 2016, with 201 of those from the Pacific. The focus of the Abbott Government on aid supporting private sector development was no disadvantage to the scholarship program, and in some regions was beneficial. But the program was inconsistent across different countries: it was not the same to be an Australia Awards student from Indonesia as it was to be an Australia Awards student from Fiji. Awardees from smaller countries and smaller cohorts were less able to access the enrichment activities that were available to students from larger country programs.

After the focus of the 2000s on security and governance in the aid program and Australian Government policies in the Pacific, there was little policy focus on the Pacific in this period. Governance continued to be a focus of the aid program, and scholarships in particular. However, the proliferation of different ‘types’ of scholarships in the 2000s that had marked out the foreign policy focus of the Howard Government was much reduced. Perhaps it could be argued that the New Colombo Plan was in part an example of a ‘new’ scholarship, but while it was named in common with another scholarship program its focus was fundamentally different. It was, however, demonstrative of the centring of Australian interests, especially in the aid program. The New Colombo Plan was also focused on private outcomes for students who wished to have careers in business in the Indo-Pacific region. The people-to-people connections that were sought through the program were for the advantage of private companies, less for governments or public service organisations. It was also a demonstration of an increasing reliance by Australian governments, both Labor and Coalition, on the ‘optics’ of scholarships over the longer-term outcomes.

This centring of Australian interests in the aid program is also evident in the substantial investment into the Global Tracer Facility, which is focused on understanding the extent of four possible outcomes of the various scholarship programs that have been in place over the decades. Of those four outcomes, three revolved around positive outcomes for Australia, its businesses and community. Fundamentally, by 2018 Australian Government development

scholarships had become more focused on diplomatic outcomes and the possible short-term impact of scholarships than on the substantial long-term outcomes the scholarships could achieve. Nevertheless, the scholarships remained in place as a key element of Australian Overseas Development Assistance, perhaps the only aid program to have lasted this long in one cohesive form.

This text is taken from *Mandates and Missteps: Australian Government Scholarships to the Pacific – 1948 to 2018*, by Anna Kent, published 2024 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/MM.2024.10