

Conclusion

This is the first time that a comprehensive history of Australian Government scholarships to the Pacific has been written. This book has traced the development and implementation of scholarships since the first Australian Government international scholarship, the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme, in 1948. The scope and timeline of this project, running parallel to the emergence of overseas students as a mainstay on Australian university campuses, allows the book to be more than just a history of scholarships. It is also a history of Australia's international education policies. And because Australian Government scholarships were, over these 70 years, a fundamental element of Australia's aid program, this is also in part a history of Australian foreign aid and foreign policy in the Pacific.

The long timeframe allows us to see patterns over time and connections between scholarships and foreign policy. A focus on the provision of development scholarships in the Pacific has enabled the investigation of Australian governments' international development scholarships that have hitherto been marginalised by interest among scholars in the Colombo Plan. This work does not ignore the Colombo Plan, but it does shift the lens for understanding international development scholarships and international aid away from it. It is clear that the Colombo Plan has influenced the delivery of scholarships from its inception until the present. It has shadowed, and often overshadowed, the scholarship schemes that have been offered in the Pacific. In many ways, it is this limited frame of thinking that has prevented the development and design of solutions more tailored to the needs of the Pacific.

There are a number of clear insights that can be taken from this book. Scholarships have continued with various motivations and designs across the period this book covers, with a changing cast of invested stakeholders who wished to make their stamp on scholarship design and outcomes. Funding and money have been important to various expansions and contractions in

scholarship schemes and numbers. This is particularly evident in the late 1980s and then again in the late 2000s and into the 2010s. And as this book makes clear, there are explicit links between scholarships and politics. Scholarships are part of Australia's foreign policy, but they also reflect domestic policy and political imperatives.

Bearing in mind these insights, several clear themes run throughout the work. These are: National interest, and in particular the way in which the malleability of scholarships supported the Australian national interest, which was also far from fixed or singular. In most of its renderings, considerations of the Pacific were relatively insignificant or presumed in relation to Australia's national interest. Decolonisation is another key theme, in particular the decolonisation of territories and colonies in the South Pacific, and the intersection between scholarships and these processes of colonisation and decolonisation. The final theme is the concept of incrementalism, of un-radical, iterative policy change in scholarships over more than 70 years.

Because scholarship designs and approaches reflected domestic policy and domestic needs, they were often more focused on meeting the needs of Australia's interests than they were on meeting the needs of Australia's bilateral aid partners. In addition, scholarships to the Pacific were rarely front of mind for policymakers, even those who were focused on scholarships and education aid. Scholarships designed for other regions were extended, often belatedly, to the Pacific and the one proposed program intended to be specifically for the Pacific never made it past the concept stage. Later schemes with more flexible approaches did allow for regional adjustments to better suit the specific needs of Pacific Island countries, but these adjustments often conflicted with the broader aims of the scholarship schemes.

While the policy focus was rarely trained on the Pacific, when successive Australian governments approached the Pacific they did so with a paternalistic view, seeing the island territories and then states as minor players in broader 'big power' politics. This approach can be seen in the 1960s as diplomats discussed expanding Australia's colonial obligations in the Pacific, despite a global movement towards decolonisation. It can also be seen in the introduction of Australian controlled selection for scholarships, and an overwhelming focus on 'governance' as an area of study in the 2000s. Rather than having the concept of development front of mind when developing and implementing scholarships, often Australia's national interest, again Australian interests, played an overwhelming

role. Nevertheless, the adaptability of scholarships to meet the different interpretations and understandings of national interest that were held by different departments and bureaucrats in governments have proved vital to the longevity of scholarships.

Managing and controlling aspects of the scholarship program were colonialist. 'Paternalistic' was how one Fijian academic described the change to Australian-centred selection that was a fundamental part of the Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (EMSS) program in 1989.¹ The change gave the Australian Government more power to control the types of students who were coming to Australia. While this decision was always couched in the language of effectiveness and equity, especially given the preference by some governments for specific ethnic groups within their country, it privileged the decisions made by Australian Government representatives and created a controlling, neo-colonial framework for the scholarships.

This book has also highlighted the nexus between decolonisation and scholarships. The role of education and scholarships has been identified as crucial for the development of anticolonial movements in other contexts.² On the other side of the coin, as noted in the Introduction, scholarships may not be explicitly a colonial project, but they are certainly influenced by colonial era thinking and the privileging of Western styles of knowledge. Many Pacific Island states had little access to higher education until the late 1960s, so travelling for higher education was the only option for those capable and willing. In the case of Papua New Guinea (PNG), the lack of access to higher education was a direct result of Australian policy inaction and the belief of a number of Australian politicians and bureaucrats, including Paul Hasluck, that the development of PNG would be best served by a slow and gradual movement to educational attainment. This approach did not match the ambitions or desires of many of the people of PNG or the expectations of the United Nations; the Australian Government was forced to establish a university in PNG well before there was broad access to high school. These policy and planning failures had long-term impacts, and still mark the Australian Government's relationship with PNG to the present day. In other territories and nations of the Pacific, using scholarships to develop a cadre of alumni who viewed Australia positively has been an overt

1 Tupeni Baba, 'Australia's Involvement in Education in the Pacific: Partnership or Patronage?', *Directions: Journal of Educational Studies* 11, no. 2 (1989): 43–53.

2 Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139681001.

goal of scholarships since the first scheme in 1948. This was seen as an acute need as those nations gained independence and the influence of colonial powers waned, and the Australian Government feared the influence of other nations such as the USSR and more recently China.

Another important theme within this book is the malleability of the scholarships offered. Scholarships were used by different actors for different purposes. While the Australian Government was the overarching 'actor' providing these scholarships, within that bureaucracy many departments and individuals fought for their goals and aims in shaping the scholarship schemes. Interdepartmental disputes between the Department of External Affairs (DEA), the Commonwealth Office of Education (COE), the Department of Immigration and the Prime Minister's Department marked many of the schemes discussed in this book. For example, in the late 1940s and 1950s DEA staff were keen for Australia to support newly independent states, while the Prime Minister's Department and the COE were more concerned to keep the scholarship bound within the frame of the British Empire. The compromise achieved, the Australian International Awards Scheme, allowed the Prime Minister's Department to trumpet the generosity of Australia at the Montreal Commonwealth Conference in 1958. Australia's participation in the Oxford Commonwealth Education conference of 1959 led to its inclusion in the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, a program that not only allowed students from developing nations to study in Australia, but also supported Australian students to study across the Commonwealth (usually in the UK). This is analogous to many debates about aid and development assistance at the time, with Australian politicians still believing Australia to be a 'developing country' while wanting to support the development of other developing countries in the region (never for purely altruistic reasons). By joining the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee in 1961 and conducting a review of Australian aid in 1964, DEA was able to more firmly place Australian aid in its global context, and highlight the diplomatic benefits of a structured and purposeful aid program.

The addition of a bureau focused on aid delivery, and a professionalising of aid policy development in the 1970s added more voices to the debate about the purposes of scholarships. These scholarships, while ostensibly 'development' scholarships aiming to support developing countries to build the skills and knowledge of their citizens, had other goals. Influencing key public servants, promoting Australian higher education, supporting

Australian educational institutions, diplomatic negotiation ‘chips’ – these were some of the many and varied goals of a single scholarship scheme. This does not diminish the impact on the individuals and communities who benefited from these scholarships. These political aspects of the schemes, while beneficial for the longevity of the scholarship programs, did not necessarily serve the interests of all parties involved.³ A clear-eyed view of the motivations behind scholarships should be important for all of those involved, but identifying those motivations can be a challenge.

In a finding notable for its potential to influence scholarship design in the future, this research has highlighted another aspect of scholarship delivery in Australia over the last 70 years. Iterative change has marked scholarship design and delivery, with elements of each scheme influencing the next. There have been moments of revolutionary zeal, such as the Whitlam Government’s subsidy scheme and the Hawke Government’s EMSS, but these are rare. In addition to each scholarship influencing the next iteration, scholarship design was influenced by other government and private scholarship programs. The Rhodes Scholarship had a clear influence on the implementation of scholarships around the world, and in turn so did the Fulbright. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan development was a chance for many different nations to share their own scheme designs, influencing each other. Aspects of scholarship design were shared across schemes, and many schemes continue to share common restrictions and requirements.⁴

This book also shows that domestic and immigration policies have always had a significant impact on international scholarships, and international education more broadly. This reality is important to understanding how international scholarship programs are perceived within the Australian community. For example, the South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme was created to counter the negative impacts of the White Australia Policy in South-East Asia. Many of the equity elements of the EMSS, including a gender balance target, were influenced by equal opportunity legislation across Australian jurisdictions. The ending of the subsidy scheme was heavily

3 Research by Anne Campbell and Emelye Neff points to unresolved conflicts of purpose within scholarship programs leading to ‘ambiguous models and inadequate evaluations as well as diffuse programming driven by unclear expectations’. Anne C Campbell and Emelye Neff, ‘A Systematic Review of International Higher Education Scholarships for Students from the Global South’, *Review of Educational Research* 90, no. 6 (2020) (online publication): 2, doi.org/10.3102/0034654320947783.

4 For example, the requirement of students to return ‘home’ for two years was common across many schemes but there is no clear reason for this timeframe.

influenced by the introduction of fees for domestic students; charging fees for domestic students while international students were still subsidised was not a sustainable policy position.

Through all these scholarship program evolutions and redesigns, Australia was establishing the role it would take within the decolonising region. This was particularly true in relation to the territories under Australian control, such as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea and Nauru. Debates around citizenship, responsibility and obligation continued well after independence, and in some cases continue into the present day. The focus in this book on the relationship between Australia and the territory and then nation of PNG is fundamental. This research reinforces other work that highlights the failure of successive Australian governments to properly develop the education system in PNG, as was its responsibility as the trustee and colonial power. This failure has reverberated through the decades, and the continuing demand for Australia Awards scholarships and Australian aid funding reflect, in part, a continuing need expressed by the Papua New Guinean Government and population for access to higher education.

This work has been focused on Australian Government scholarships, which have been supported by both major political parties. A clear line can be drawn from the South-East Asia Scholarship Scheme to the Australia Awards, representing a substantial segment of Australia's aid program across decades.⁵ The programs have changed in their conditions and terminologies, but the continuity of scholarships for students from developing countries to study in Australian universities has remained. The Australian Government, through these scholarships, sought to train students who would become important and influential on their return home. That influence and importance is intended to lead to development outcomes but is also intended to lead to Australia being in a position to leverage that influence. The balance between these two elements is precarious and shifts further to the side of development outcomes in some schemes such as the EMSS, or in the other direction for others, such as the Australian Leadership Awards.

5 Because of the way scholarships were budgeted for differently across this period, the exact proportion of the aid budget can be difficult to calculate. According to the Australian National Audit Office in 1998, the Australian Development Scholarships made up approximately 9 per cent of the total aid budget – *Management of the Australian Development Scholarship Scheme*, Audit Report No. 15 1999–2000 (Canberra: Australian National Audit Office, 1999).

As already noted, the period covered by this book parallels decolonisation in the Pacific, which began at the end of the Second World War and continues today. And while other research has found connections between educational opportunities and anticolonial sentiment,⁶ this book has not found substantial evidence that a large number of students who studied in Australia developed a sense of nationalism, or anticolonialism, during their time in Australia. This is not to say that it did not occur, but merely to say that this research has not sought nor found evidence to suggest it. This is an area where additional research would be of great utility.

The recording of the stories of alumni has changed significantly over the period this book analyses. This is highlighted in the student stories included in each chapter. The earlier stories are pieced together with the aid of archival documents and newspaper articles. Later stories are oral histories, interviews with alumni, long after they have returned home. For recent alumni, the stories are more prevalent and accessible, although it can be difficult to understand the place that their scholarship will play in their broader life story. This change, however, highlights the desire by governments and universities to use the stories of these students as a marketing and corporate social responsibility tool, and a desire for the scholarships to be measured and quantified for impact and outcomes. The recording and publication of these stories is an area of further research and work that merits attention.⁷ The experiences of these students and alumni in Australia provide valuable insight into the nature of Australian society and changes to the community and its attitudes over time. The experiences of alumni after they return home also provide the Australian Government and the public with an understanding of the value of their investment in these scholarships.

This research has also traced the development and growth of the international education sector in Australia, through the lens of scholarships. This element of this book puts forward a more comprehensive and thorough investigation of the history of this sector than has previously been published. In particular, the conventional narrative that focuses on the Colombo Plan as the first point in a timeline is not accurate, nor is the pinpointing of the

6 Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*.

7 Work done by Julia Horne, David Lowe, Jemma Purdey and Jon Ritchie has provided excellent oral histories recording the experiences of students. Nevertheless, the Australian public continues to misunderstand both Australian Government scholarships and the international education sector more broadly.

Jackson Report as the beginning of the 'trade' approach to education as an exportable commodity. The history of international education in Australia is another area where further scholarly research is overdue.

In essence, this book has found that international development scholarships are more a reflection of Australia, its sense of its role and position in the Pacific, than they are a reflection of the needs and requirements of Pacific Island countries. The Australian Government's relationship with Pacific Island states evolved substantially over the 70-year period this book addresses. The relationships have always been complex and multifaceted, but the power balance has never been equal – Australia has always perceived itself as a leader in the region, either as a colonial power or a 'deputy sheriff'. The scholarship programs, as part of broader aid programs, have encouraged (often unsuccessfully) Australian diplomats and bureaucrats to understand more about the Pacific Islands, but as repeated Senate inquiries have shown, the Australian Government never really came to terms with the bilateral relationships with Pacific nations. Successive governments continued to take Pacific Island nations and their 'allegiance' for granted. Mistakes, problems and stereotyped assumptions have been repeated by Australian bureaucrats over generations. Nevertheless, the provision of scholarships to Pacific Island countries has continued uninterrupted for 70 years. Scholarships remain popular with Australian and Pacific politicians and, on the whole, with alumni. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

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.