

PART 5:

1997–2018

This is the final part of this book, covering two major scholarship schemes and just over 10 years. The first chapter covers the period in government of John Howard, and the Australian Development Scholarships scheme (ADS). Howard and his government became fixated on the security threat posed by small and unstable states in the Pacific. This preoccupation came about because of two key events: the Timor-Leste independence referendum and subsequent conflict from 1999, and the September 11 attacks in the USA in 2001 and a growing perception that Australia was surrounded by an ‘arc of instability’ in the Pacific. Terrorism and security concerns shaped aid allocations and decisions around scholarships, and the Australian Government became bolder when it came to intervention in conflicts.

The second chapter of this part addresses the final scholarship scheme of this book, the Australia Awards. The Australia Awards did not diverge from the ADS significantly in design, but the name change signifies a broader change in the scholarship program. Development was no longer at the centre of the name, nor the centre of the scholarship program. The diplomatic outcomes of the scholarship became far more significant. This chapter addresses this change, and other important changes in aid administration and scholarship management. The chapter, and this book, concludes in 2018, at a time when policy focus was beginning to shift back to the Pacific, in large part to counter the influence of the People’s Republic of China.

Paulus William Kei, Lavarah Haihavu and Jakapi Arigo

The stories of students of this more recent period are easier to find, less like the puzzles and snippets from previous parts of this book. This is in part due to investments made by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade into a Global Alumni Strategy in the 2010s, which involved a website profiling students who have completed, or are completing, their studies. Universities were also keen to profile their Australia Awards students as part of their marketing efforts. But crucially, these alumni have completed their studies more recently, which means that the long-term impact of their studies are either yet to be felt or not yet obvious. Unlike alumni such as Judy Annemarie Wong, we cannot see the full trajectory of their life. There are immediate impacts for most of these alumni, but their reflections will change over the course of their lives. Their recorded stories are also more likely to be, in part, a marketing tool that is edited for public consumption. These examples will rarely give the unvarnished version of their experiences, including the difficulties and setbacks as well as the positives and happy experiences. Nevertheless, issues that have been part of the students' stories of the previous part remain present. This includes the ability to use the agency gained during a scholarship to choose a life and home, and the nature of status and privilege.

Paulus William Kei studied in Australia between 2006 and 2007, at Southbank Institute of Technology in Brisbane.¹ In an interview about his experiences he clearly identified the positives of the scholarship – on the face of it, he epitomises the 'poverty reduction' element of a scholarship program. He had a difficult childhood, finished school at the end of Year 10 and had a number of jobs until he became a lab technician. He was promoted in the lab when he returned from his studies in Australia, and had been able to undertake project consultancies for additional income. However, some members of his family struggled to reintegrate into Papua New Guinea (PNG) when they returned, and he noted in his interview that he was now saving money to send his children to Australia for a 'better life'. By utilising the skills he developed in Australia he was working to subvert, perhaps unconsciously, one of the goals of the scholarship program.

1 Paulus William Kei, interview, 14 December 2014 in David Lowe, Jemma Purdey, and Jonathan Richie, 'Scholarships and Connections: Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, 1960–2010', data set, Deakin University, 2015.

But in doing so was supporting another outcome of the scholarship – an ongoing connection to Australia. In addition, the pressure he felt to return home despite a job offer in Australia demonstrated the conflict that the scholarship can create within an individual. Kei had been given a level of agency through his program, but he was not able to exercise this agency with freedom because of the restrictions of the scholarship, and thus returned home, a process made especially difficult for his family.

Agency is a key memory for Lavarah Haihavu, who was interviewed in December 2014 about her experience as a PNG ADS student in Australia.² Studying in Australia was a difficult and complicated experience for Haihavu, who found her Masters program challenging. Nevertheless, in her reflections she notes that during her time in Australia she had fewer responsibilities, and was able to live free from the perceived burden of her extended family. Haihavu's experience, and reflections, also demonstrate how the scholarships place barriers to access. She was able to gain a scholarship from a position of relative privilege, as she had an undergraduate degree and was working at a university when she applied for her first scholarship. When she applied for a second scholarship, a research degree, she was unsuccessful. Haihavu interpreted this as being the result of her lack of 'insider' status – she was not connected to the aid program sufficiently to be awarded a scholarship.

These two examples represent a great number of the benefits of the ADS scholarship program. The two students successfully completed their degrees, and their experiences were life altering in largely positive ways. However, they also embody a number of the complications and drawbacks that scholarship students over the decades experienced. They attained a level of independence and agency during their study, but were unable to convert that into action in part due to restrictions on returning home.

From the Global Alumni website we are able to find the story of Jakapi Arigo, who first studied for a Masters in IT with an Australia Awards scholarship.³ She returned home to PNG, but has returned to Australia for a second Masters. Her profile focuses on her choice of Queensland as a destination, unsurprising given the profile was commissioned by Study

2 Lavarah Haihavu, interview by Jemma Purdey, Port Moresby, 16 December 2014, in Lowe, Purdey and Richie, 'Scholarships and Connections'.

3 'PNG's Jakapi Arigo on IT, Masters, Queensland and Rugby League', Australia Global Alumni, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), 2019, www.globalalumni.gov.au/alumni-stories/pngs-jakapi-arigo-on-it-masters-queensland-and-rugby-league, accessed 15 July 2020.

Queensland. Arigo's case is interesting in the context of the Australia Awards, given her preference for gaining work experience in Australia after her second Masters. Because she is not an Australia Awards scholar for her second Masters program, she is not bound by a return home requirement. She noted that she would like to 'ultimately' return home to PNG, but her short-term plan is to work in Australia. She has been able to make the choice to stay in Australia, a choice not available to Paulus Kei.

While these stories, and the others collected by the Australian Government, state governments, universities and other educational institutions purport to tell us the stories of success of the Australia Awards, their positive framing and brevity give very little insight into the experiences the students and alumni have had. This reflects the reality of scholarships, where outcomes can take years and sometimes decades to manifest. Finding the stories of recent Pacific scholarship alumni is relatively easy, but the insights to be gained from these snippets do not provide significant depth. The puzzles constructed from archival material telling the stories of students from the 1950s also fail to provide the full story, but the benefits of time and reflection do allow for greater understanding.

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.