



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

15 April 2024

Mr Peter Varghese AO
Independent Review of Commonwealth Funding for Strategic Policy Work
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
Andrew Fisher Building
1 National Circuit
Barton ACT 2600

By email: Varghese.Review.2024@pmc.gov.au

Dear Mr Varghese,

Re: Independent Review of Commonwealth Funding for Strategic Policy Work

The University of Sydney is pleased to contribute to the [Review of Commonwealth Funding for Strategic Policy Work](#) ('the Review'), which presents a timely opportunity to evaluate how Commonwealth-funded strategic policy work is coordinated and utilised by the Commonwealth agencies that form Australia's national security community.

Australia boasts a world-class research sector within its public universities – institutions with missions and values that align with Australia's national interests. The high quality of Australian university research is widely recognised and was confirmed in the most recent Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) evaluation, which found 90 per cent of their assessed research to be at or above world standard.¹ Importantly, despite the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic and other challenges for the sector, educational institutions in Australia inspire a high degree of public confidence and remain some of the most trusted institutions in Australia.² Thus, university research capabilities represent a rich resource for government agencies to support national security strategy and policy development, implementation and decision-making.

The University of Sydney is dedicated to undertaking research that matters and is committed through our [2032 Strategy](#) to research that tackles the greatest challenges facing our nation. We are perhaps uniquely positioned to draw on our extensive strengths in the humanities and social sciences to explore and explain the profound social, economic, legal and cultural implications of these challenges. Our multidisciplinary approach brings together experts from a range of fields in public policy, national security, social sciences, migration, economics, business studies, health, the humanities, science, and law among others, to provide comprehensive insights into the complex dynamics of strategic policy, grounded in evidence-based knowledge. Furthermore, our strategic policy community is well-connected externally through the collaborations with partners including government agencies, defence and intelligence organisations, other universities in Australia and overseas, and industry stakeholders.

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While we have many university-based or affiliated institutes and multidisciplinary initiatives (MDIs) that could qualify as ‘third party organisations’ capable of conducting strategic policy-related research, education and engagement activities for the Commonwealth, the following centres and institutes are highlighted as particularly relevant to this review:

- Sydney Policy Lab
- United States Studies Centre
- China Studies Centre
- Centre for International Security Studies
- Sydney Southeast Asia Centre
- The James Martin Institute for Public Policy

Further information on each of these centres and institutes is provided in the **attachment**. We also have numerous highly esteemed individual academics and affiliates who are conducting strategic policy research on behalf of the Commonwealth and/or providing advice to Commonwealth agencies.

A productivity challenge for both the government and universities is to ensure that Australia’s university research capacity is fully utilised across government. **The Australian Universities Accord Final report released in February 2024 found that Australia’s governments and industries are “...not making enough use of university research capability and capacity, nor are they using it across as broad a range of disciplines as they should be.”**³ Given the strength and breadth of Australian university research, there are many benefits if this under-utilisation can be corrected and coordinated to support the national interest through the provision of timely and high-quality strategic national security policy services. As the Accord found:

“Every day, governments and industry are working on complex problems. Ideally, they should turn to the research sector for assistance with solving these. Not only does this bring appropriate expertise to bear and enhance the chances of a quality solution, but it also drives researchers to engage in problem solving in areas of national interest. This has both a push and pull effect: researchers have their research capability appreciated by those who use it and governments and industry get appropriate expert assistance to find answers to their problem.

As well as commissioning research to shine a light on hard problems, some governments use the university sector for consulting needs. As noted in the Productivity Commission’s 2023 5-year Productivity Inquiry: Advancing Prosperity report, this should happen more extensively. Governments at all levels should lead by example in the use and uptake of Australian university research capability, capacity and consulting, as well as using the direct outputs of research. As part of enabling this, Commonwealth, state and territory government procurement policies should optimise procurement processes to make drawing on university expertise easier.

Government procurement of Australian research will not only drive better recognition of Australian university research but should motivate universities to improve the discoverability, accessibility, quality and competitiveness of their services.⁴

Ensuring that governments and industry use university research capability effectively, maximising capacity and output must be a priority of both the Commonwealth and universities. We would be pleased to discuss and consider any draft recommendations your review develops that would support this endeavour.

At the University of Sydney, we understand that the most complex problems require partnerships to deliver solutions. Our significant disciplinary and multidisciplinary strategic policy capabilities are assets for Commonwealth agencies within the national security community. It is in the national interest to ensure more publicly funded research of this nature is undertaken by Australian universities and that the capability this investment supports is accessed and utilised more effectively by government agencies across the Commonwealth.

We look forward to the outcomes of the Review and any recommendations that assist the University to better support national security objectives.

Yours sincerely,

(signature removed)

Professor Mark Scott AO
Vice-Chancellor and President

Attachment Examples of University of Sydney and affiliated centres or institutes with relevant expertise

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Sydney Policy Lab

The Sydney Policy Lab was created by the University of Sydney to be a multidisciplinary, non-partisan, public policy laboratory where communities and the academy can come together to investigate and solve complex policy issues that face our world. The Lab works alongside communities to help deliver different kinds of desirable, feasible and viable policy solutions. The Lab represents a powerful contribution by communities and the University to the common good.

The Lab's prime focus is working on and with community. It was created by people searching for practical answers to the question of how we can best arrange our life together. Its work reflects this, building relationships between people from diverse backgrounds to encourage greater empathy and understanding, to drive the creation and implementation of community-led policies. In particular, the Lab works with those who have been excluded from decision making, leadership and power. The [Sydney Policy Lab 2024-2027 Strategy](#) is available online.

The Lab is known for its community centred policy development and implementation. The mediums and formats it uses reflect a commitment to diverse expertise and are designed to be valuable for the target audience and impactful more broadly. Examples include creation of 'public policy laboratories' on specific issues, Chatham House rules roundtables with ministers and members of parliament, collaborative research projects, public fora, creative artefacts, reports, policy briefs and working papers.

United States Studies Centre

The United States Studies Centre (USSC) at the University of Sydney is an independent, university-based research centre, dedicated to the rigorous analysis of American foreign policy, economic security, emerging technology, politics and culture. Its mission is to make discoveries and draw insights with tangible value for Australian policymakers, businesses, scholars, students and the general public, generated by independent, non-partisan, rigorous research, delivered through communication, teaching and outreach. USSC units of study cover a wide range of subject areas from US politics to American comedy, climate change to dissent and protest. Further information can be found in the USSC submission made separately to the review.

China Studies Centre

The China Studies Centre enhances the University of Sydney's long tradition of excellence in China research by bringing together researchers on China and on China-related matters from across faculties and disciplines, enabling international academic collaboration with researchers from China and other countries, and being a research-informed voice in Australia's public China discourse.

The Centre represents the largest collection in Australia of academic expertise who research China and Chinese culture. Its 109 members are drawn from the social sciences, business studies, health, engineering, the humanities, science, law, architecture, and music.

The Centre for International Security Studies

The Centre for International Security Studies was established in 2006, along with the Michael Hintze Chair of International Security, to produce innovative research and education programs on the enduring and emerging security challenges facing Australia, the Asia-Pacific and the world. The Centre takes a multidisciplinary approach to the study of international security and draws on a wide range of skills and expertise from academics, researchers and practitioners across the University and from around the world.

The Centre's research informs debates and promotes engagement with the policy community, NGOs and the public. It works with organisations spanning policy and operations, uniquely positioning us to analyse and interpret the strategic implications of world events for governments, businesses and individuals.

Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre builds on the expertise of and facilitates collaborations between over 400 University of Sydney academics who specialise in Southeast Asia. The Centre undertakes research, teaching and outreach on issues relating to Southeast Asia and has an even larger body of students participating in Southeast Asia initiatives and units of study across the University. The annual Politics in Action forum features timely analysis of political affairs in six Southeast Asian countries, for an audience of scholars, students and the general public.

James Martin Institute for Public Policy

The James Martin Institute (JMI) is an independent, non-partisan public policy institute with charitable status, working to ensure that government can more effectively harness expertise and evidence for the benefit of the people of NSW and beyond. As a formal partner of the NSW Government, JMI is a unique joint venture between government and six universities in NSW (Sydney, UTS and WSU (founding partners), Wollongong, UNSW and CSU) to create an independent, enduring public policy institute that will solve complex public policy challenges through smart collaborations that harness world-leading research.

¹ Australian Research Council (2019) [State of Australian University Research 2018-19](#).

² ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods (2023) [Attitudes towards education in Australia](#), p. iii.

³ [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#) (February 2024), p.13.

⁴ [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#) (February 2024), p.199-200.