

Dr Michael Spence

Vice-Chancellor and Principal

27 November 2015

15 October 2015

Senator Alex Gallacher

Chair, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

By email: fadt.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Gallacher

Inquiry into Australia's relationship with Mexico

The University of Sydney is pleased to provide a response to the timely inquiry you are leading into Australia's relationship with Mexico.

At the institutional level the University has several linkages with leading research and educational organisations in Mexico. Our activities are centred on building stronger people-to-people links between Australia and Mexico by promoting the University and Australia as a high quality educational destination and source of research expertise. In addition to our student recruitment activities we are actively seeking out mutually beneficial research and other partnerships with government, industry, NFPs, universities and other Mexican organisations.

Some fields where we see current or emerging synergies of interest between Mexico and Australia are in agriculture, the food-water-energy nexus, engineering and the whole spectrum of health issues (see below for examples of our engagement).

Our capacity to develop linkages and partnerships in Mexico over the long term will depend on the quality of our formal and people-to-people links, and the extent to which Australia invests strategically in positioning itself in Mexico as an attractive country with which to develop business, research, education and other linkages.

We see potential for the Federal Government to deepen and strengthen Australia's ties with Mexico by utilising the expertise and resource of its universities more fully and effectively.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mr Tim Payne, Director, Higher Education Policy and Projects in my office in the first instance (tim.payne@sydney.edu.au, 02 9351 4750) if you require anything further from the University of Sydney.

Yours sincerely

Signature removed for electronic distribution

Professor Stephen Garton

Acting Vice-Chancellor

Attachment University of Sydney specific comments relevant to the Inquiry's terms of reference

University of Sydney submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee's inquiry into Australia's relationship with Mexico, October 2015

Introduction

The University of Sydney's international strategy includes fostering international engagement with governments, industry, other educational institutions and communities.¹ As part of this strategy, our particular objectives for engaging with Mexico include:

- **fostering** research and educational collaborations with the region's leading universities and research institutes;
- **developing** industry and government linkages in identified areas of mutual national interest to address specific challenges facing both regions, especially the food-water-energy nexus and healthy societies;
- **building** stronger people-to-people links, for example by attracting more high quality students, especially at the postgraduate research level; by encouraging internship opportunities for our students to experience living and working in the region; and by increasing opportunities for our Spanish language students to engage in a study and language stay in the region; and
- **promoting** Australia as a safe and high quality destination for students and researchers from the region, and the University as an high quality education and research institution.

Internationally, we are developing strategic global partnerships with relevant government ministries, in-country non-government organisations, research institutes and universities. Our assessment is that these partnerships could be leveraged to enhance Australia's bilateral relationship with Mexico.

Summary of recommendations

1. Leverage individual university and international university grouping networks (OECD, APRU) to increase Australia's engagement with Mexico.
2. Encourage the Australian Government to work more closely with Mexican National Commission for Science and Technology CONACYT at the executive level to send a greater number of scholarship students to Australia based on our research excellence in shared interests.
3. Include Mexico in the government's New Colombo Plan to facilitate student mobility and develop people-to-people linkages.
4. Develop and fund an integrated set of initiatives to raise awareness in Mexico of Australian higher education excellence, and to strengthen people-to-people linkages.
5. Utilise the expertise and networks of Australia's higher education institutions, including board members of highly relevant centres like our John Grill Centre for Project Leadership, to complement the government's activities in Mexico, showcasing Australia's expertise across priority industry sectors and building people-to-people networks.

¹ The University's international strategy correlates with our statement of purpose:
"We aim to create and sustain a university in which, for the benefit of both Australia and the wider world, the brightest researchers and the most promising students, whatever their social or cultural background, can thrive and realise their full potential."

Comments on the terms of reference of particular relevance to education and research

b. Opportunities for enhanced relations, including the potential for increased bilateral engagement and also through jointly held memberships such as the G20, APEC, OECD and MIKTA

The University of Sydney is a knowledge partner of the OECD and participates in its working groups, research committees and forums. We host annual OECD events and regularly send experts to participate in the OECD forum in Paris. Through our OECD partnership we held a number of events around the Brisbane G20 meeting in 2014.

There is great potential, via our partnership, to raise awareness of Australian expertise to Mexican participants at relevant OECD events and visits.

The University is also a member of APRU (the Association of Pacific Rim Universities), a network of 45 leading research universities in the Asia Pacific Region. In Mexico, UNAM and Tecnológico de Monterrey are active participants. Australia is represented by the University of Sydney, UNSW, the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University. Activities through this network include annual meetings, workshops, research projects and student mobility. We will, for example, host the Asia-Pacific Women in Leadership (APWiL) Workshop in 2017.

Relevant to the MIKTA partnership, which brings together Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia and particularly Australia's strong links to the Asia Pacific region, the University is home to the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC), with many academics also involved with the Australia-Indonesia Centre (AIC) led by Monash University. The AIC fosters collaborative research in several key areas: energy, food, agriculture, infrastructure and health. We have worked closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, hosting a number of civil society events for dignitaries through the SSEAC. Recently, for example, the SSEAC delivered a two-week training program on organisational leadership and management practice for 25 female NGO leaders from Indonesia through the Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction Program (MAMPU).

Significant opportunities exist to enhance people-to-people linkages with Mexico through relevant organisations during workshops, annual meetings and other events. Our experience has been that international visitors and speakers enjoy visiting Australia's higher education institutions and engaging with students, staff and communities. Australia's trade and diplomatic relationships with Southeast Asia and China could be of interest to Mexican officials and broader community engagement could be achieved, leveraging academic expertise and utilising Australian higher education institutions as platforms for discussions.

We are also a member of the Australian Latin America Business Council (ALABC) and regularly sponsor and co-host events. Engaging with the business community is an important activity in raising the profile of the University and we will continue to support ALABC as a way of engaging in Latin America. As education services are one of Australia's largest exports we view links with the Australian government as essential in assisting Australian higher education institutions to gain market access and pursue new international opportunities.

Recommendation 1 Leverage individual university and international university grouping networks (OECD, APRU) to increase Australia's engagement with Mexico.

d. Scope for increased collaborations in the education sector and the potential for extending scholarship programs in Mexico

The University has several academics with research and/or outreach interests in Mexico. We also have experts across our faculties who have specific knowledge sets that can address common issues facing our regions (agriculture in water and food security, energy and infrastructure and health). We have a Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies with strong collaborations in Mexico. We

have formal agreements with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Tecnológico de Monterrey and the Universidad Anahuac for student mobility.

Specific areas where we have ongoing linkages with Mexico include joint research in the area of water management with the Mexican Institute for Water Technology (IMTA). This collaboration was initially funded by the former AusAID Public Sector Linkages Program. Through the training programs a demand for further capacity building in Australia was identified to meet the challenges of future climate change, water availability and its impact on agriculture in Mexico.

We also have strong research linkages with the International Centre for the Improvement of Wheat and Maize (CIMMYT) in Mexico through our Plant Breeding Institute (PBI), and many of the staff at CIMMYT studied at the University of Sydney.

Expertise at the PBI and world leading research being undertaken in Australia is of great importance in global food security. This area of excellence could be further supported and highlighted by increasing the opportunities for visiting researchers through Australian government scholarships for the region. This would enhance linkages and help to develop collaborations.

The University's Charles Perkins Centre for Obesity, Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease is a unique interdisciplinary centre dedicated to easing the burden of these chronic diseases and related conditions through innovative research and teaching. Mexico shares these challenges and there is scope to enhance linkages in the health area. Joint research is already under way in the area of infant nutrition through a joint project with the Harvard School of Public Health and the Mexican National Institute of Public Health.

The Mexican National Commission for Science and Technology (CONACYT) is an important institution providing international scholarships and research grants for Mexican academics and students. CONACYT has developed bilateral scholarship arrangements with the USA, Canada and Europe. There is a perception, however, that Australia is unwilling to invest in the relationship. Australia is currently not benefiting from the program as much as it could. Very few Mexican students use CONACYT scholarships to travel to Australia and organisational relationships are largely *ad hoc*. In our assessment Australia would benefit greatly if stronger linkages could be established with CONACYT at the Government level.

On the other hand, Australia and its higher education institutions benefited enormously from government scholarship programs established recently by Chile and Brazil, which have resulted in thousands of students coming to Australia to study. This has provided excellent opportunities to develop new people-to-people and research linkages, as well as economic benefits for universities and the broader economy. In both cases the agreements were strongly encouraged and supported by Australian government officials.

Critically, the programs in Chile and Brazil provided an anchor for bilateral university relations and a financial impetus for Australian universities to invest in partnerships in those countries. As a direct result of the scholarship programs, awareness about Chilean and Brazilian institutions was raised and the number of academic partnerships, joint publications and joint research programs has increased.

Another benefit of scholarship programs to Australia is an increase in the number of graduates who enter the workforce in their home countries providing important government, business and industry linkages. For example we have now developed joint university and industry research partnerships in Brazil supported by Brazilian companies through linkages with our graduate students.

A focal point such as a bilateral scholarship program or research fund to increase awareness and build people-to-people linkages is needed to grow partnerships with Mexico. Despite Mexico having very good research institutions and shared research interests there is no specific financial support that can be used to develop new partnerships at this moment.

Representatives from the University of Sydney visit Mexico frequently. The objectives of these visits are to raise the profile of Australian education and research in general, and the University in particular. While we observe that there is general goodwill towards Australia, there is generally a low

level of awareness about our research expertise and the quality of our educational institutions. US and UK higher education have a higher profile and remain the preferred options for the best students from the region, and for research partnerships. In 2014 education contributed the majority of Australia's \$82 million service exports to Mexico². In our opinion there is an opportunity to grow education exports to Mexico, although achieving this growth involves raising awareness about Australia and its education opportunities.

To enhance education collaborations with Mexico, Australian government officials could develop stronger linkages with key decision makers and engage with their counterparts in Mexico to send a greater number of its CONACYT scholarship students to Australia. From an institutional perspective, linkages with industry, business and civil society have not yet been developed. An increased number of returning graduates from scholarship programs would expand Australia's networks in Mexico and encourage partnerships.

DFAT's New Colombo Plan for mobility scholarships in the Indo-Pacific Region could be expanded to more countries in the Asia Pacific Region, including Mexico, to enhance bilateral relationships with APEC member countries.

The Australian government frequently receives invitations to participate in Mexican government conferences and workshops, providing expert speakers. The provision of discretionary funds through the Council on Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR) or another avenue to support speaker travel expenses would allow universities to participate in these events, benefiting the Australian higher education sector generally by raising the profile of Australia and its expertise. The expertise of academics provides an immensely valuable resource for helping to complement the work of government, promote informed debate and develop sustainable solutions.

Recommendation 2 Encourage the Australian Government to work more closely with Mexican National Commission for Science and Technology CONACYT at the executive level to send a greater number of scholarship students to Australia based on our research excellence in shared interests.

Recommendation 3 Include Mexico in the government's New Colombo Plan to facilitate student mobility and develop people-to-people linkages.

Recommendation 4 Develop and fund an integrated set of initiatives to raise awareness in Mexico of Australian higher education excellence, and to strengthen people-to-people linkages.

f. *Scope for cross investment and joint ventures in Australian and Mexican infrastructure projects*

The University's John Grill Centre for Project Leadership was established in October 2012 with a donation of \$20 million from alumnus John Grill, on his retirement as chief executive of Worley Parsons. The centre addresses the need to enhance leadership capability and enable organisations to deliver large-scale global projects successfully by

- providing focused executive education
- fostering project leadership through relationships with those at the forefront of complex thinking, practice and policy
- leading and driving collaborative cutting-edge research
- developing unique insights and best practice through the centre's local, national and global networks.

An opportunity exists to showcase Australia's expertise in project management, infrastructure and joint ventures by utilising the expertise of the John Grill Centre Board to leverage connections and people-to-people networks.

² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Mexico Fact Sheet, June 2015

Recent visits to Mexico indicated significant interest in the John Grill Centre offerings and Australia's experience in infrastructure development more broadly.

The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement may also open up new training and consulting opportunities with Mexico, and we see a continued role for Australian government officials in Mexico to help strengthen relationships between Australian universities, Mexican industry leaders and government.

Recommendation 5 Utilise the expertise and networks of Australia's higher education institutions, including board members of highly relevant centres like our John Grill Centre for Project Leadership, to complement the government's activities in Mexico, showcasing Australia's expertise across priority industry sectors and building people-to-people networks.

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