

ARTICLE

# How to Write Policy Briefs

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(Received 18 September 2024; revised 17 November 2024; accepted 29 December 2024)

## Abstract

How do we persuade historians and history students to adjust from their familiarity with longer forms of writing to embark on a policy brief exercise? On the one hand, the need for humanities scholars to engage with policy-makers is arguably more acute than ever, given the gravity of policy choices we face; however, on the other hand, some will understandably resist what they see as the dangers of humanities becoming instruments of centers of policy-making power. We find, in a case study of historians and history students in Australia, that there is considerable willingness to tackle the task of a policy-brief, and willingness to engage with policy-making more broadly. Students who have taken on the task of writing policy briefs have said that it hurts, but they have also found it to be a rewarding and worthwhile exercise. Established scholars have done similarly, arguing that the time is ripe for more humanities scholars to take up the challenge.

**Keywords:** briefs; history; humanities; policy

A few years ago, we interviewed a senior Australian public servant in our capacity as directors of Australian Policy and History, a network of historians bringing academic expertise to bear on public policy debates.<sup>1</sup> This departmental head believed in the importance of historical knowledge to good public policy-making and was an avid student of history himself. We were perturbed, therefore, at his response to our inquiry about how academic historians were perceived by politicians and policymakers. “You are basically invisible,” he told us. “If historians want to have a place in public debate, they need to learn to distil their big books into two-page policy briefs.”<sup>2</sup>

## 1. What is a policy brief?

A policy brief is a distillation of research bearing on a current policy issue that provides decision-makers, or those with policy influence such as journalists, with preferred choices of action. It is an advocacy tool, as it makes a recommendation. A policy brief can be part of a bigger advocacy campaign, combined with meetings, lobbying, and media efforts to

<sup>1</sup> See <https://aph.org.au/>. A recent book arising from APH activity is Holbrook, Megaritty, Lowe (eds), 2022.

<sup>2</sup> For more detail on the (dis)connections between academic research and public policy, see Connelly et al. 2015; Greene 2016; and Smith 2018.

influence decision-making. A policy brief features clear and direct communication, as it is aimed at informed but non-specialist audiences. It is therefore easily understood and free of academic jargon. As its name suggests, it is a short piece of writing (that may include graphs, charts, or other illustrations) aimed at time-poor readers. It cannot aim to build a comprehensive case in favor of a course of action, but it should be sufficient to hook an audience in and make them inclined to ask for more detail or evidence.<sup>3</sup>

Governments and large organizations have long relied on policy briefs as part of their decision-making processes. To date, humanities scholars have been less active in making policy briefs part of their skill sets than their colleagues in the social and hard sciences. But changes are afoot, and we hope that humanities scholars will continue to show greater preparedness to dive into the policy brief space.

## **2. A template for policy briefs**

At the Australian Policy and History website, we added the policy brief genre to our suite of publications. After researching various forms of policy briefs, we created the below template.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.1. Attention**

Address a policy brief to the government official responsible for the relevant policy area, even though the brief's readership will be much wider.

### **2.2. Title**

Use a short title only, without rambling text placed after a colon.

### **2.3. Executive summary**

Include a succinct summary of the issues at stake, the range of responses possible, and the main recommendations provided. Undertake this summary task last, after you have completed the other sections. It needs to encapsulate at a glance and be totally consistent with what you have written in these other sections. It will also convey that you know the world of the intended reader. They are time-poor and appreciate writing that is direct and can be followed easily.

### **2.4. The problem**

This is where you demonstrate your mastery of the problem under consideration based on your deep reading and deliberation. You also demonstrate your capacity for incisive synthesis. Tell the reader what has happened – a very short history of the most salient information. What are the key issues as identified by different parties invested in this policy dilemma? Which of the issues generates the most disagreement? Are there some things the different parties agree on? Convey also why the policy dilemma has come to a head at this juncture.

<sup>3</sup> This summary draws especially on Young and Quinn 2017 at the International Centre for Policy Advocacy.

<sup>4</sup> The best guides we found came from the International Centre for Policy Advocacy (Young and Quinn 2017) and the Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ("Policy Briefs"), 2024.

### 2.5. *Policy alternatives*

You need to lay out several possible courses of action, bearing in mind that one option might be to take no action at all or something very minimal. Your reader will want a course of action that is justifiable with different stakeholders, including allies, opponents, and immediate superiors. In your options, factor in your sense of what timing is best. Does this need to be addressed now rather than later? Might one possibility be to lay the ground for a more fulsome response later, at a time you think might be better? Be sure to list at least three possible options. Using bullet points is acceptable for this kind of list. Resist the temptation to pose implausible options, just so that one sensible one stands out, which does not give your reader a real choice at all. It is better to go with options that may only differ slightly than some that are unrealistic.

### 2.6. *Policy recommendations*

Here you settle on a preferred course of action, choosing one of the options you have listed above, accompanied by a short statement of why this is the preferred option at this time. You should not make dismissive or negative comments about other options. It is possible that your reader will not agree with your choice but decide to run with one of the other options listed. Do not hedge your bets with either/or scenarios.

### 2.7. *Sources consulted*

Provide a short bibliography of works consulted, arranged alphabetically with full citation details, just as you would for a scholarly article. Your list needs to include any sources you have drawn directly or referenced, and it might also include one or two that were valuable for background or big-picture thinking. While it is not likely that a time-poor policy-maker will be doing further reading, you never know who might want to dive into the issue a little more.

## 3. *Policy briefs in action*

Policy briefs are a potential, time-effective connection between academia and large organizations, including governments, that have not always appreciated the value of the humanities. In the bigger picture, the state of the world, and the policy challenges we face, decision-makers need the best help they can get, and they need it now! The need for evidence is paramount for those wondering about new courses of action. While social scientists might be more instinctively comfortable with providing evidence, the humanities generate evidence, too. Humanities scholars are trained to research dimensions of the human experience that need to be present in policy considerations.

As several commentators have pointed out, it is not the case that humanities scholars and policy practitioners need to merge the ways in which each thinks and works. The two cultures will usually be quite different. What is needed is not the coproduction of knowledge but easily accessed translations from one world into the other that arise through a shared sense of endeavor. Effective translations enable research to move easily between the two cultures.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In particular, see Connelly et al. 2015; Greene 2016; and Smith 2018.

Since adopting our approach to policy briefs at Australian Policy and History, we have been heartened by the response of our academic colleagues, most of whom have relished the opportunity to apply the logic of their historical expertise to practical policy recommendations. The range of subjects addressed in policy briefing notes has been wide, from future directions for the New Colombo Plan (government-sponsoring Australian university students to spend time studying in the Asia-Pacific region), artificial intelligence and education, democratic decay, aid assistance from Australia to Papua New Guinea, and the need for apology and redress for mistreatment of LGBT members of the Australian military. Three examples, using a common template but showing minor variations regarding emphasis and sources, are included as [Appendices A, B, and C](#) below.

More generally, there is a growing field of research into how policy briefs might meet the needs of decision-makers in an age of information overload and questions over how experts' insights can be best disseminated.<sup>6</sup> Among the advantages of a policy brief is that its form makes it easier to engage with the policy community. Even an 800-word opinion piece might be passed over by an overburdened political staffer, but the structured layout of a policy brief and its practical recommendations invite engagement and open the possibility of further discussion. We have enjoyed success in engaging with political advisers in the private offices of members of parliament after emailing them policy briefs pertaining to their areas of focus.

An entire academic monograph cannot be usefully condensed into a two-page policy brief. The evocation of a time and place, of complex personalities, intricate events, and human experiences cannot be conveyed in two pages of tightly structured content. Rather, the policy brief can complement and augment the monograph, as academic historians develop the agility to swing from writing vast, detailed, and complex accounts of the past to providing highly distilled “lessons” – we hesitate to use that word lest it imply a simplistic application of past experience to the present, though we prefer it to alternatives such as “take-home messages” and (even worse) “learnings.” As humanities scholars are pushed increasingly into instrumental research, into acquiring “industry partners” and demonstrating applied outcomes, they are more able to articulate the practical outcomes required of the policy brief. Our challenge is to maintain our commitment to the kind of knowledge and analytical insight that comes from deep and time-consuming research and provides our disciplines with intellectual rigor and integrity while being able to condense that knowledge into a form that demonstrates, not just contemporary relevance, but practical application.

#### 4. Teaching policy briefs

We have also incorporated policy-brief writing into our teaching. Doing so addresses a pedagogical need for intelligent variation in the assessment tasks we set for students. In our view, essay-writing skills remain essential but insufficient. We want students to be able to say to potential employers that they developed policy-briefing skills.

Thus, several years ago we started asking second-year undergraduate students to complete a policy brief in a history course called *Conflict and its Legacies in Modern Asia*. As the title suggests, this subject considered the unfinished business of modern conflicts in Asia, including difficult topics such as the brutality directed at civilians in and around the Korean War, the multiple forms of imperialism inflicted on Taiwan, and the abuses by Japanese

<sup>6</sup> See Arnautu and Dagenais 2021.

armed forces perpetrated on the ‘comfort women’ of Korea and other nations. The task we set for students was diabolical. Students had 750 words to tackle the policy briefing task (see [Appendix D](#)). Not content with inflicting only one form of assessment torture, we came up with an alternative briefing exercise (see [Appendix E](#)).

In offering some guidance to students, we encouraged them to pay particular attention to audience, tone, and purpose. They were writing for an imaginary ambassador whose time was precious. They could not afford to use jargon or refer to obscure concepts and sources which would take time to track down. If there was complexity, then it needed to be summarized quickly and directly. And crucially they had to help the ambassador make decisions about what to say and what not to say. The ambassadors needed a contextual background, but they also needed clear options and the consequences or implications that went with these options.

We reminded students that form mattered. There were different parts that their ambassador would be looking for which we felt helped students to organize their writing. Depending on the intended recipient of a policy brief, these subheadings may vary a little, but something like the above list tends to help separate policy briefs into short, easily read-chunks of essential information. Indeed, this sorting and arranging is something that might be aided by AI and modified as needed. We also required students to provide references throughout their document – something that might not always happen in diplomatic or government settings, but perhaps should!

We were happy with the results of students’ efforts to present evidence in the form of policy briefs, and the students generally seemed happy, too – while reminding us of how difficult the tasks were. Students also seemed to embrace the value of having this policy-brief-writing capacity in their toolkits. While we have been careful not to overdo it, and not to have too many policy briefs being undertaken across different history subjects, this type of assessment task retains a presence in the History major.

## 5. Final thoughts

We hoped, in both the Australian Policy and History examples and the student assessment exercises, that the policy briefs produced were distillations of deep historical thinking and research, rather than “dumbed down” exercises. For the most part, we were pleased that this seemed to be the case – but we also acknowledged that this risk was inherent in what we were asking. We feel that the risk is worth taking.

In his controversial article in *Perspectives on History*, James Sweet referred to a predecessor as president of the American Historical Association, Lyn Hunt. Twenty years earlier, Hunt had written in the same forum that rising presentism threatened to “put us out of business as historians.”<sup>7</sup> It feels like academic historians are going out of business, and we are not convinced that presentism is the reason, so much as our lack of appeal to the states, societies, and students that fund what we do. Whether forms such as policy briefing notes can signal a constructive engagement with the state and wider society contiguous with the maintenance of what we consider to be disciplinary integrity remains to be seen. In the meantime, humanities scholars must keep discussing why what we do matters, and making sure we tell the world.

<sup>7</sup> Hunt 2002 quoted in Sweet 2022.

**Acknowledgments.** We would like to acknowledge the support of our colleagues in Deakin's Centre for Contemporary Histories and the Australian Policy and History Network.

**Funding Statement.** No funding was received for this article.

**Conflicts of Interest.** The authors declare none.

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## Appendix A

16 September 2022

### Attention

Minister for Education, Hon Jason Clare MP.

Special Minister of State, Senator the Hon Don Farrell.

### Title

A Major Public Education Campaign about Australian Democracy.

## Executive summary

It is well recognized that democratic governance is in retreat around the world, including in nations with which Australia typically compares itself. Australia is not immune from democratic decay, with research showing that trust in government and civic institutions is declining, particularly among young people and the disadvantaged. This policy brief proposes the institution of a wide-ranging and inclusive program of public education about Australian democracy, including its history and advantages, while not shirking from recognition of its failures.

## The problem

Threats to democracy in recent years, most obviously and alarmingly in the United States, indicate that democratic systems are more fragile and precarious than we imagined. Democracy is not secure unless it is underpinned by a broad public consensus and a deep political and cultural commitment to the maintenance of civic institutions. These problems are widely recognized, both within Australia and internationally.<sup>1</sup>

There are reasons to be concerned that *Australians are not sufficiently equipped to be custodians of our democratic system:*

- Civics education was reintroduced in Australian schools in 1997, yet the most recent review of the civics curriculum indicated that only 38 per cent of Year 10 students—the level at which the compulsory civic curriculum finishes—are proficient in civics and citizenship knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Young people care passionately about issues such as gender equality and climate change, but we must better connect their concerns with the political system.
- The data about school education sit within a wider context that is highly concerning. Trust in democracy in Australia has been plummeting since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer shows it has fallen six points since 2021, the second biggest decline behind Germany.<sup>3</sup>

## Policy issues/alternatives

There are several issues that need special consideration when considering a public education campaign about democracy:

*Historic lack of attachment to our democratic institutions:*

Australians' civic deficit has deep roots. Federation failed to lodge in the national imagination in 1901 and the Anzac legend became entrenched as an alternative national mythology from 1915.

*Constitutional and Federation reform:*

The Australian Constitution has proved extremely difficult to alter—only 8 of 44 referendums have succeeded since Federation. While referendums often involve highly complex and technical issues, history suggests that voters make their decisions emotionally rather than rationally. Creating a sense of pride and custodianship among Australians about our democracy is vital to achieving major initiatives such as an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, a republic, and federation reform. Unless people are engaged imaginatively, they will resort to voting 'no' to change.

*We need to create a mythology of democracy not another program of civics education:*

Civics education in schools has not been successful in repairing the civic deficit. A public education campaign centered around the concept of 'our democracy,' which promotes pride in our democratic achievements, will create the emotional engagement that is a prelude to the acquisition of civics knowledge.

*Anzac commemoration:*

Over one billion dollars have been allocated by the government to Anzac commemoration over the last several years, including a \$500 million renovation of the world-class and amply funded Australian War Memorial. While much of this money would be better spent on veterans' support services, some could be diverted towards a public education campaign about our democratic inheritance and our role as custodians of Australian democracy.

*A diverse nation:*

The latest census results confirm how culturally diverse our population is—27.6 percent of us were born overseas, and 48.7 percent have at least one parent born overseas.<sup>4</sup> Some of us come from places where democratic mores are not culturally entrenched; many have no connection to the Anzac legend. We need to include *all* Australians in the democratic project.

**Policy recommendations**

People protect what they value. I recommend the introduction of a major government-led campaign of public education about Australian democracy:

- The program will emphasize achievements such as the early enfranchisement of women, early use of the secret ballot, compulsory voting, preferential voting, our independent, national electoral commission, and Saturday voting.
- In celebrating Australia's democratic achievements, the program will also acknowledge failures, most obviously relating to Indigenous Australians and non-Anglo migrants.
- It will be highly inclusive and emphasize that democracy is a precious and vulnerable asset, for which *all* Australians are responsible.
- A public education campaign will not only safeguard our democratic system but also restore faith in politics and encourage Australians to become involved in grass-roots activism, such as demanding action on climate change and wealth inequality.

**Sources consulted**

1. E.g., [Report](#) of Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee on Nationhood, national identity and Democracy, December 2021; [Report](#) of House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into constitutional Reform and referendums, December 2021; '[Threats to American Democracy](#),' 17 May 2022, Brookings Institution, Washington DC; 'Democracy Under Threat: A Case for Co-ordinated Action?,' House of Lords Library, UK Parliament, 27 January 2022.

2. 'National Civics and Citizenship Report released,' ACER Discover, 22 January 2021.

3. [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) 2022.

4. [Australian Census 2021](#), Australian Bureau of Statistics.



**Contact**

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**Appendix B**

20 August 2019

**Attention**

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Marise Payne.

**Title**

A Reassessment of Australian Aid for Papua New Guinea.

**Executive summary**

This policy brief proposes a reassessment of Australia's aid to Papua New Guinea (PNG) considering the growing Chinese influence in the region and the recent shift in PNG's leadership, which signals a potential change in its foreign relations. To strengthen bilateral ties and maintain influence, Australia should move away from interventionist aid models and return to untied budget support, empowering PNG to determine its development priorities while fostering a more collaborative relationship.

**The problem**

Historically, Australia has regarded PNG as either a security barrier or a security threat. The late nineteenth-century colonial ambitions of European powers in the Pacific so alarmed the Australian colonies that they pressured Britain to take control of the southeast portion of the island in 1884. In 1914, in one of the first military actions of World War One, Australia seized control of German New Guinea. By 1921, Australia had secured New Guinea as a Class 'C' mandate from the League of Nations; consolidating Australia's long-held ambition to control the entire eastern section of the island and create a security buffer against outside threats. The Japanese invasion of New Guinea in December 1941 reinforced in the minds of Australians the strategic importance of PNG. Unlike imperial powers motivated by economic and geopolitical gain, Australia has never valued PNG as an important economic resource. It is the location of this land mass so close to our mainland that motivates and underwrites Australian policy towards PNG.

Prior to the Second World War, the Commonwealth made minimal financial contributions to PNG: New Guinea received no financial assistance, and Papua only £42,000 per annum. There was a radical change in the ambition of Australian policy for PNG following the end of the war. The government promised a substantial boost to spending, which preferenced the socioeconomic advancement of Indigenous Papua New Guineans. This policy aimed to further bind PNG to Australia; grant money and Administration officers became indispensable to the raising of living standards. Australia benefited by creating a stable and peaceful island to govern, providing an ideal platform to maintain PNG as an effective security barrier.

During the first few decades of PNG's independence, from 1975 until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Australia gave aid as unconditional budget support; the money was spent by the PNG government on education, health, and infrastructure. Over the course of the 1990s, budget support converted to targeted program support often to NGOs. In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack and the Bali bombings, Australia adopted a more robust and interventionist approach; what Sinclair Dinnen, a senior research fellow at ANU, describes as the 'progressive securitization of Australian development assistance'. In practical terms, there was a direct insertion of Australian personnel, and a focus on 'whole of government' support, consistent with international practice in relation to aid to so-called 'fragile states'.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Policy issues/alternatives

Australia remains the dominant donor to PNG; in fact, there are very few countries where a single bilateral donor is so important. A 2007 OECD report gave the ratio of Australian to total aid at above 80%. Following historical convention, we continue to choose where our aid will be spent; we offer technical or security expertise where it best suits Australian needs.

Consistent with both its colonial and post-9/11 policy aims, Australia's foreign policy set out in the 2017 White Paper continued to focus on the security of the Pacific region. The rhetoric is similar, the white paper argues development programs are more important to Australia than they have ever been, providing a ballast against instability by advancing economic reforms, improving governance, and countering violent extremism. Today the foreign threat, as perceived by Australia, is Chinese influence on the region, but in this context, I suggest the reaction is much the same as in 1944 with the Japanese, the Communist threat of the 1960s, or terrorism from the early 2000s- they are regarded as a foreign threat to regional security and Australia will actively push back against such action.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Policy recommendations

On his recent elevation to the prime ministership of PNG, James Marape encouraged continued strong relations with Australia but warned of a shift away from reliance on traditional partners. Marape, who comes from the energy-rich Hela province, is concerned that financial returns from natural resource contracts are not equitably distributed and believes PNG should be looking further abroad, modeling its resource policies on Indonesia and Malaysia. The threat of China to Australian influence in PNG has become increasingly obvious as China dramatically increased aid spending but with a different approach to Australia. Instead, China offers both untied aid, similar to Australia's original post-independence support, and signature infrastructure in addition to concessional loans. These forms of aid are more appealing to the PNG government for the measure of autonomy they provide them. Now is an opportune time for Australia to rethink the relationship based on Eurocentric assumptions of expertise in development, and instead ask the Papua New Guineans how best we can help them.

- A 2018 Deakin University study found praise among a broad section of PNG leaders for the unconditional nature of Chinese aid.
- The most important change to aid policy would be a move back to untied budget support instead of direct intervention in the guise of program support. The government should incorporate comprehensive reporting indicators to ensure the effective use of grant aid. Importantly, the assistance will be directed where Papua New

Guineans most want it, not just as a response to the Australian desire for strategic security.

- This change of direction would affect a shift in the quality of the Australian/PNG relationship; effectively leaving China behind. While China generally focuses on large infrastructure projects, which garner prestige for itself and sponsoring politicians, PNG continues to be beholden to the wishes of a foreign power. By changing policy direction, and by becoming more collaborative, Australia would provide an opportunity for Papua New Guinea to become the sole arbiter of where to best spend and direct the assistance we provide.[3]

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### Appendix C

4 April 2023

### Attention

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong.

Minister for Education, Hon Jason Clare MP.

## Title

Maximizing the Value of the Colombo Plan

## Executive summary

Under the New Colombo Plan, introduced in 2014, the Australian government funds Australian students to undertake study in the Asia-Pacific region. In light of the dynamic geo-political situation in the region, the Australian government must ensure that the program continues to meet its objectives of promoting Australian soft power and Asia-literacy. This brief recommends that the New Colombo Plan be reformed to provide employment incentives for outbound students upon their return and to increase the engagement of returned students with the Asia-Pacific region. It also recommends the reinstatement of general merit-based scholarships for Australians to study in the region and students from the Asia-Pacific to study in Australia.

## The problem

It has been 11 years since the launch of the 2012 *Australia in the Asian Century: white paper*, and nine years since the launch of the [New Colombo Plan \(NCP\)](#). Australia now faces a vastly different strategic outlook. You have asked for advice on how to ensure that the NCP continues to support the objectives of the government in the Asia-Pacific region.

The decade since the launch of the 2012 white paper has seen many great geopolitical shifts that are causing Australia to reflect on the best way to engage with its regional neighborhood. A quick glance at the themes of the submissions to the white paper is instructive in that they focus on soft power aims rather than pure hard power objectives. Overall, there were more than 160 submissions relating to people-to-people links with Asia, and Australia's engagement with Asia directly through international education was referenced in around 80 submissions.[1] International education will continue to provide a great opportunity for Australia to build stronger regional relationships.

The election of the Abbott government in 2013 saw the white paper shelved as a document of reference, and a desire for the newly installed Coalition government to carve out their own foreign policy agenda. The response was driven largely by then-foreign minister, Julie Bishop. The NCP began in 2014 as a pilot program that aimed to foster a two-way flow of students between Australia and the rest of its region. This distinguished it from the original Colombo Plan which was one of Australia's first genuine attempts to provide aid within its own region. The scheme was also notable as it reversed the objective of its predecessor. Rather than receiving students from Asia, the NCP was designed to provide Australian students with more opportunities to engage with the Asia-Pacific region. Through this scheme, the Federal Government has provided around \$320 million since 2014 to support 10,000 undergraduate Australian students annually to study short-term in Asia.[2].

## Policy issues/alternatives

The NCP is comprised of two separate arms, the Scholarship Program and the Mobility Program. The Scholarship Program supports around 120 students each year to undertake an offshore study program of up to 19 months and the Mobility Program provides assistance for around 10,000 students to engage in shorter term projects. Funding for the NCP for financial years 2020–2021 to 2022–2023 was budgeted at a consistent spend of \$51 million per annum.

However, updated documents show a revised spend of \$43.87 million for 2021–2022 and \$45.087 million for 2022–2023.[3] The election of the Albanese Labor government in May 2022 provided some uncertainty surrounding the future of the NCP. However, early signs suggest that funding for the program will continue. The new round of 2023 NCP Scholarships was the largest yet, with 150 scholars set to be hosted across 24 host locations.

The continued rise of Asia has continued to impact Australia in a myriad of ways. The Asia-Pacific accounts for two-thirds of Australia's two-way trade with 11 of the top 15 partners coming from the region.[4] Australia is now a more multicultural place than it was in 2012. ABS data shows that the percentage of overseas-born Australians increased by 2.2 percent in the decade from 2011 to 2021. Six of the top 10 source countries are in Asia, while traditional markets such as England and New Zealand are now making up a smaller percentage of Australians born overseas.[5] This changing demographic allows Australia to present itself with a new face in the region.

However, outside of the NCP, the Australian government has largely failed to grasp the opportunities presented by its connection with the Asian region. Australia's engagement with Asia (or the Indo-Pacific) has largely been predicated on security and economic interests in the region, while a wider commitment to cultural engagement has been subject to differing domestic political aspirations. While important, these forms of engagement are not able to build longer-lasting, people-to-people links that help to insulate against political shocks.

International education, and by extension, greater development of Asian literacy among Australian graduates, has the potential to shape Australia's future relationship with its geographic region. The NCP should continue to play a role in facilitating Australia's engagement with the wider Asian region. However, to improve its role in driving greater engagement with Asia, the NCP needs to develop longer and deeper connections with the students it sponsors to travel to the Asia-Pacific region.

Currently, the majority of NCP scholars spend little over a semester on average in their destination city. In 2019, there were more than 50,000 Australian students who participated in an overseas experience. Significantly, only 21 percent spent more than one semester in their host country. Rather than fully immersing the scholar in the region, this short-term experience is at present only providing them with a limited impression of their host country. On return to Australia, rather than being supported by the NCP, the student returns to their home campus with limited support to continue the interest generated from their trip overseas.

The value of the NCP in furthering the career ambitions of scholars is also ambiguous. A national survey of 1371 NCP students and alumni from across 40 universities found that while 89 percent of respondents found the experience useful for their CV, less than half felt their experience was valued by their current employer or helped with career promotion. [7] Furthermore, existing attempts to maintain formal links with NCP alumni have proven patchy at best. The above survey found that only 27 percent of NCP alumni had joined the associated LinkedIn group, while only 1 in 10 had spoken about their NCP experience at a department or university event or had attended networking events with other NCP alumni.

## **Policy recommendations**

### ***Better leveraging of returning outbound students***

Returning NCP scholars to Australia is an untapped resource that can be used to promote greater awareness of Asia. These scholars have the potential to be great storytellers regarding their experiences. While the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) website does feature interviews with past NCP scholars, more efforts need to be made to keep them engaged within the region in the long term. Rather than serving merely as a resume builder for the scholars, longer-term engagement with the region needs to be incorporated as a key focus of the program.

### ***Improved mentor connectivity and job-ready nurturing programs in return for outbound students***

Linked with the previous recommendation, returning NCP scholars need to have a more established pathway following their return to Australia. As part of this, greater awareness of the value of Asian literacy needs to be made clearer to industry as a job-ready skill. This could take the form of an NCP graduate pathway for participating employers to opt in to. DFAT, under the existing funding model, could subsidize these positions.

### ***Reinstatement of general merit-based scholarships***

Since the closure of the Endeavour Awards program in 2019, Australia lacks a dedicated merit-based scholarship program to support Australian postgraduate students studying in Asia or students from Asia who are looking to study short-term in Australia. This has particular implications for Southeast Asia, because of the traditional importance of education within these bilateral relationships. The NCP has a clear focus on assisting undergraduate students seeking to study in Asia. The reinstatement of a scholarship program with clear policy objectives focused on post-graduate students would help to strengthen bilateral relationships within the region.

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### Appendix D

It is November 2007. You have recently joined the Japanese diplomatic service, and you have arrived as an advisor to the Japanese Ambassador in Beijing.

An unexpected invitation arrives at the Embassy. The Japanese ambassador has been invited by the Chinese government to join a ceremony marking the re-opening of the Nanjing Massacre Museum after a renovation. The re-opening will occur soon, on 13 December 2007, the date marking the 70th anniversary of the start of the so-called 'massacre' of 1937–1938. Thousands of people are expected to attend. The invitation suggests that the Japanese Ambassador will be invited to make a short speech and may also be asked some questions by the press afterward.

Your task is a sensitive one. It is to prepare a set of briefing notes for your ambassador, taking into account the current Japanese government's stand on depictions of the events in 1937–1938 at Nanjing, and taking into account what the best diplomatic language will be. You should divide your notes into two sections:

1. Notes for a short speech
2. Notes for possible questions the Ambassador may be asked to answer

This is an exercise that takes the form of a Policy Brief rather than a conventional essay form and can consist of key points rather than flowing, connected paragraphs.

We do not require Appendices, but It is also important that the Ambassador be able to substantiate comments or provide more details if asked, so you should provide footnotes throughout your notes, and a bibliography (or consulted sources) of sources used.

No pressure, but it is up to you to help avert a possible major international flare-up!

Good luck!

## Appendix E

It is early December 2021. Having joined the Japanese diplomatic service after completing a history degree at university, you have been posted as a junior officer to the Japanese Embassy in South Korea.

An unexpected invitation arrives at the Embassy. The Japanese ambassador has been invited by the South Korean government to join a ceremony on 14 December marking the tenth anniversary of the erection of the Comfort Women Statue in Seoul in 2011.

Thousands of people are expected to attend. The invitation suggests that the Japanese Ambassador will be asked to deliver a short speech and may also be asked some questions by the media.

Your task is a sensitive one. You have been asked to prepare a briefing note for your ambassador, taking into account the current Japanese government's stance on the Comfort Women Statue in Seoul, and considering how best to avoid giving offense to a crucial ally against nuclear-armed North Korea.

You should provide a briefing that enables the Ambassador to:

1. Make a short speech
2. Anticipate possible questions the Ambassador may be asked to answer

This is an exercise that takes the form of a policy brief rather than a conventional essay form and can consist of key points rather than flowing, connected paragraphs.

Remember the importance of the different parts, i.e., Title, Executive Summary, Context or Scope of Problem, Policy Alternatives, and Next Steps (or Recommendations).

We DO NOT require Appendices, but It is also important that the Ambassador be able to substantiate comments or provide more details if asked, so you should provide footnotes throughout your notes, and a Bibliography (or Consulted or Recommended Sources).

No pressure, but it is up to you to help avert a potential major international incident...

Good luck!