

# Chapter 4

## Education and Research

4.1 The Australian government's Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Mexican government's Secretariat for Public Education (SEP) first signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in education and training in 2003. The MoU provided a framework for cooperative activities and was renewed in 2008 and again in 2015.<sup>1</sup> The MoU enables development of future collaboration and facilitates the exchange of teaching materials, accreditation systems, education policies and occupational standards.<sup>2</sup>

4.2 In 2005 and 2011 Australia hosted delegations of senior officials from Mexico to discuss education policies including early childhood, schooling, teacher quality, vocational education, and quality assurance arrangements. The 2011 visit concluded with a postgraduate study scholarship agreement between the SEP and Macquarie University.<sup>3</sup>

4.3 Following the appointment of a DET Education and Science Counsellor in Latin America in 2014 and the signing of the new MoU in 2015, DET is working with the SEP to establish a joint education committee to undertake a range of work to 2018:

Consistent with the bilateral discussions which have taken place during the past year to identify topics of mutual interest, the joint work is expected to include qualifications framework and recognition arrangements; teacher training (including English) and evaluation; equity, access and participation; education quality and funding (schools, VET and higher education); federal-state education roles and responsibilities; research systems, policies, quality and impacts; and sharing experiences about policy implementation practices.<sup>4</sup>

### *Multilateral engagement*

4.4 The Australian government works with Mexico in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum to support cross-border education cooperation. DET also works with Mexico through the Pacific Alliance on qualification frameworks and recognition arrangements. In September 2015, DET hosted a workshop which provided a holistic view on Australian qualification recognition, national frameworks, government policy and legislation from creation to implementation.<sup>5</sup>

4.5 The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to understand the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders during meetings with Australia's quality

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1 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 2.

2 Secretariat for Public Education, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

3 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 2.

4 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 5.

5 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 2.

assurance agencies, institutions, professional bodies and non-government assessing authorities.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Mexican student mobility***

4.6 As at July 2015 there were approximately 1 000 Mexican students enrolled at Australian higher education institutions with the majority studying commerce and management.<sup>7</sup> In 2012, over 27 000 Mexican tertiary students studied overseas with 50 per cent choosing to study in the United States. Other popular destinations include Spain, France, Germany and the UK. Australia is the eighth most popular destination, with only two per cent of Mexico's international tertiary students.<sup>8</sup>

4.7 Mexico is Australia's fourth largest source of international students from Latin America after Brazil, Colombia and Chile. In 2014, there were 2 117 Mexican students enrolled in Australia in the following categories:

- 27 per cent in English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students;
- 27 per cent in Higher Education; and
- 24.5 per cent in Vocational Education and Training (VET).<sup>9</sup>

4.8 The number of enrolments is almost 90 per cent higher than it was 10 years ago and 21 per cent higher than in 2013.<sup>10</sup> Education Intelligence<sup>11</sup> has projected that Mexico will have one of the most mobile tertiary age populations aged between 18 and 22 in the world by 2024.<sup>12</sup>

### **Scope for increased collaboration in the education sector**

4.9 Australia's education and research engagement with Mexico has grown over the past ten years but is still relatively small, both in relation to Australia's global engagement and Australia's share of Mexico's international engagement.<sup>13</sup>

4.10 Various opportunities exist for Australian providers not only in student mobility but VET and English language training as well. Given Mexico's commitment to improving its level of education and the strong reputation Australian institutions have in this field, there is considerable scope for Australia's education sector to benefit from the investment that the Mexican government plans to make in this sector.<sup>14</sup>

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6 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 2.

7 Universities Australia, *Submission 33*, p. 2.

8 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

9 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

10 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

11 Education Intelligence is the British Council's global research team specialising in higher education.

12 Australian Trade Commission, *Submission 39*, p. 15.

13 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 1.

14 Australia-Latin America Business Council, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

4.11 Mexico's education sector grew faster than Latin America overall during 2014, with an increase of more than 25 per cent in commencements.<sup>15</sup> In terms of international student flows, Mexico represents a significant emerging market. Mexico also initiated an ambitious education reform agenda under the *Pacto por Mexico*, which was agreed between Mexico's three main political parties in December 2012. The reforms were aimed at increasing participation and improving the quality of education. The agenda covers areas such as teacher quality, evaluation and assessment practices; school infrastructure; curriculum; and duration of compulsory education.<sup>16</sup>

4.12 However, Mexico presents greater challenges than most other Latin American markets given the student preference to be educated in Mexico, its proximity to competitors like the United States and Canada, and the absence of significant Australian scholarship programs for students.<sup>17</sup>

4.13 Universities Australia data indicates that in 2014 there were 101 active agreements between 37 Mexican institutions and 22 Australian universities.<sup>18</sup> This represents little more than one per cent of the almost 8 000 active agreements that Australian universities had in place in that year. The Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) noted in their submission:

There is potential to increase the number of Mexicans studying in Australia and opportunities to capitalise on niche transnational education training, research and consultancy services. A highly educated and skilled workforce is required to achieve Mexico's economic development objectives and existing skills gaps need to be addressed.<sup>19</sup>

4.14 Submitters also highlighted that some of Mexico's lead institutions are insisting that students study overseas. For example, Tec de Monterrey<sup>20</sup> has a goal that 90 per cent of its graduating students will have studied overseas.<sup>21</sup> The rise of Mexico's middle-class, which now numbers in excess of 70 million, has also raised the prospect for an increasing number of students to study overseas.

4.15 The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) also provides a new platform to increase education engagement with Mexico. DET's submission explained:

Australian universities and vocational education providers seeking to establish or expand a campus or institution will benefit from commitments offered by Mexico that will lock in existing market openness and guarantee that future liberalisation will be captured as a TPP commitment.

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15 Australia-Latin America Business Council, *Submission 17*, p. 6.

16 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 4.

17 Australian Trade Commission, *Submission 39*, p. 15.

18 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

19 Australian Trade Commission, *Submission 39*, p. 14.

20 Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education, Monterrey, Mexico.

21 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 22.

Mexico has also guaranteed access for Australian international schools. In addition, independent Australian education professionals seeking contracts to work at education institutions in Mexico will have guaranteed access with streamlined visa arrangements and longer periods of stay, and Australian education service providers will be able to bid for government procurement contracts in Mexico.<sup>22</sup>

4.16 With Mexico's forecast growth, a young population (average age 27), expanding middle class and a substantial student population (35 million – the second-largest student population in Latin America), the country presents significant opportunities for international education providers.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Joint recognition of degree programs***

4.17 A number of submissions expressed support for increasing the number of jointly accredited undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs between Australia and Mexico.<sup>24</sup> Associate Professor Cesar Ortega-Sanchez recommended evaluating Mexican university programs for mutual recognition potential. He argued:

The best Mexican universities are ranked as high as the best Australian universities or higher. I have been a university academic in both countries and know that the best Mexican students are as good as the best Australian students. I am not suggesting recognising every single degree from every single university, but it would make very good sense to create a commission to evaluate Mexican universities and then recommend a set of rules to guide the mutual recognition of qualifications. This program could be linked with immigration plans to attract Mexican professionals who could make great contributions to the Australian economy and society. Currently it is virtually impossible to immigrate to Australia and find a job based on Mexican qualifications.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Committee view***

4.18 The committee believes there is considerable scope to expand Australia's future education and research engagement with Mexico. Mexico's expected growth prospects, large student population and growing middle class offers Australian education providers a wealth of potential opportunities. The committee supports an increase in joint initiatives between Australia and Mexico and encourages Australian universities to review their programs for potential joint recognition with their Mexican counterparts.

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22 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 4.

23 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 30*, pp 9–10.

24 Associate Professor Cesar Ortega-Sanchez, *Submission 2*, p. 1; Mrs Cynthia Gavito Paredes and Raymundo Granados Salgado, *Submission 13*, p. 1 and ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 26.

25 Associate Professor Cesar Ortega-Sanchez, *Submission 2*, p. 1

## Recommendation 5

**4.19 The committee recommends that the Australian government work together with Australian universities to review the accreditation of existing Mexican qualifications and achieve mutual recognition of qualifications by 2020.**

### *Language barriers*

4.20 An impediment to Australia's expansion in the Mexican education sector is the language barrier. There is both a lack of Spanish skills from the Australian training workforce and English skills from Mexican students.<sup>26</sup> English is widely accepted as the primary international language and it is increasingly defined as a basic skill required of every student in every education system.<sup>27</sup>

4.21 Although English skills are considered essential in an increasingly competitive labour market, English language competency remains low in Mexico. It ranked 39 out of 63 countries globally and sixth out of fourteen countries in Latin America according to the Education First survey in 2014.<sup>28</sup> The Mexican Government is aiming to teach English to all students from five to 15 years of age which will require a further 80 000 teachers.<sup>29</sup>

4.22 Mexico's expanding middle class is also seeking to improve workforce skills and employment opportunities through English language competency, which could be converted into commercial opportunities for Australia. As the ANZMEX Chamber of Commerce stated:

Australia could do more by offering English scholarships to the IST Mexican community and offering Spanish Language training opportunities to the IST teaching and research workforce in Australia. There are also opportunities to better utilise the current Spanish-speaking workforce in Australia (3,600 Mexicans and more than 10,000 Latino Americans plus people born in Australia and/or other countries with Spanish Language skills).<sup>30</sup>

4.23 The DET noted its plans for future English language training in Latin America:

In light of discussions that the department has had with Mexico and other Latin American countries about English language teacher training and English language teaching, the department is planning to hold a roundtable in early 2016 to develop a plan for working together with Mexico and the other interested Latin American countries.<sup>31</sup>

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26 Australian Trade Commission, *Submission 39*, pp 14–15.

27 Education First, *Executive Summary*, <http://www.ef-australia.com.au/epi/about-epi/executive-summary/>, (accessed 13 November 2015).

28 Australian Trade Commission, *Submission 39*, pp 14–15.

29 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

30 ANZMEX Chamber of Commerce, *Submission 8*, p. 7.

31 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 5.

## Potential for extending scholarship programs to Mexico

4.24 Australia supports Mexican students studying in Australia through scholarships, fellowships and mobility grants which are administered by DET. Education grants and scholarships help improve business connections and raise awareness of each country's market potential.<sup>32</sup>

4.25 Between 2007 and 2015, 41 Mexicans accepted an Endeavour Scholarship or a Fellowship to undertake study, research or professional development in Australia.<sup>33</sup> Since 2008, approximately 350 Australian higher education students received an Endeavour Mobility Grant to participate in a project in Mexico and 13 students from Mexico received a grant to study in Australia as part of a semester exchange program.<sup>34</sup>

4.26 The University of Sydney noted that one of the benefits of transnational scholarship programs is an increase in the number of graduates who enter the workforce in their home countries and provide future government, business and industry links to Australia.<sup>35</sup>

4.27 Existing agreements between the SEP and Australian authorities, such as the *Educational Cooperation Agreement* signed with Macquarie University in Sydney and the *Cross Institutional Education Cooperation Agreement* signed with Victoria University, enable scholarship programs to be established between Mexico and Australia and increase mobility of postgraduate students.<sup>36</sup> However, Australia could compete more robustly for international student flows.

4.28 Competitor markets are more active in creating Mexico-specific scholarship programs to support international student flows. The ANZMEX Business Council noted in their submission:

The Netherlands, for instance, has a 300-strong scholarship programme for Mexicans to study in its country. The UK runs a wide range of comprehensive scholarship programs for Mexicans, including the *Chevening Programme* which in 2015 awarded 101 postgraduate scholarships. Meanwhile, Australia has abandoned the AusAid scholarship program across the region.<sup>37</sup>

4.29 A bilateral scholarship program to increase awareness and build people-to-people linkages could help grow Australia's partnership with Mexico. The University of Sydney reflected that despite Mexico having excellent research institutions and

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32 Council on Australia Latin America Relations, *Submission 24*, p. 6.

33 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

34 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, p. 3.

35 University of Sydney, *Submission 23*, p. 4.

36 Secretariat for Public Education, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

37 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 22.

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shared research interests with Australia, there is no specific financial support available to develop new partnerships at this moment.<sup>38</sup>

4.30 Australia could become more competitive in its scholarship partnership with Mexico by implementing specific programs for the region. Mr Ramirez explained:

Following the recommendation for reform, the Mexican government has a very, very strong and interesting scholarship program. They are trying to bring up the level of professionalism for that industry. A good example in Mexico is what they did with the French and German governments. Basically the French and German governments brought in a language program for Mexican professionals who would be going to France and Germany. There are about 100 scholarships available. As a result of that, the Mexican government has full scholarships for students to do postgraduate degrees in any university that is recognised in Germany or France. A similar program could be interesting for Australia. It would bring more students here but also it would show that there is this idea of connecting with Mexico.<sup>39</sup>

4.31 The ANZMEX Business Council agreed:

[Australia]'s share of the market is, at least from observation, in decline. This is not to undermine the tireless efforts of individual universities, education agents, Austrade and the Australian Embassy, but simply a reflection of the increased resources applied by other markets such as the UK (again, it rates Mexico as a top 10 priority market for international education), Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the US. While it is obvious that Australia has a compelling offer, it simply isn't competing from a marketing perspective.<sup>40</sup>

4.32 Various opportunities also exist for Australian providers in VET and English language training. Notably, Mexico's National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) has expanded its energy scholarships program to address a critical skill shortages in the energy sector, presenting opportunities for Australian education institutions with expertise in energy, mining and renewables.<sup>41</sup> The Council on Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR) explained:

Mexico's increased training needs to improve productivity and skills are expected to provide new opportunities for Australia's vocational and training education (VET) sector. A technical skills gap exists in Mexico, particularly in the oil and gas sectors, presenting significant opportunities for Australian VET providers. Australia's industry led, competency based approach to VET is highly applicable to these kinds of challenges and there

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38 University of Sydney, *Submission 23*, p. 4.

39 Mr Keri Ramirez, Board Member, ANZMEX Business Council, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2015, p. 22.

40 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 23.

41 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Submission 30*, p. 9.

is a strong appetite from Mexican institutions to develop relationships with interested providers.<sup>42</sup>

4.33 The ANZMEX Business Council also highlighted the potential for Australia in Mexico's oil and gas sector, noting that Australia could play a role in providing trade and technical colleges with specialised qualifications in collaboration with Mexican institutions.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Committee view*

4.34 The committee understands there are significant commercial opportunities for Australia in Mexico's VET sector. The committee encourages Australia to draw on its extensive oil, gas and energy experience and play a larger role in providing Mexico's sectors with specialised VET qualifications. The committee supports government-funded initiatives to promote and establish the Australian VET sector services in Mexico during this opportune time.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**4.35 The committee recommends that the Australian government allocate additional funding for initiatives to promote Australian VET services in Mexico.**

#### *Improve connections with CONACYT*

4.36 The National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) is a Mexican institution which provides international scholarships and research grants for Mexican academics and students. CONACYT has developed bilateral scholarship arrangements with a number of countries including the USA, Canada and Europe.<sup>44</sup> Submitters argued that greater Australian engagement with CONACYT could result in a higher number of scholarship students being sent to Australia. Professor Carlin of the University of Sydney highlighted the potential opportunity:

...Mexico, as you know, has the Mexican National Commission for Science and Technology—CONACYT—which provides generous scholarship support. Our understanding is that they have got some 6,300 or so funded students throughout the world at the moment—half of those are PhD scholarships and the rest are Masters. I draw that to your attention because Australia's share of that is about 2½ per cent. We have about 150 of those. The US has about 1,500; the UK is not dissimilar. The Netherlands has 260 and Canada has 311. We have a huge opportunity there, and that is something that government can facilitate through the negotiation of an arrangement with CONACYT. That will help us enormously.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Council on Australia Latin America Relations, *Submission 24*, p. 6.

43 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 27.

44 University of Sydney, *Submission 23*, p. 4.

45 Professor Tyrone Carlin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2015, p. 33.



4.37 During its public hearing, the committee heard that although the University of Sydney has approximately 10 000 international students fewer than 50 were from Mexico.<sup>46</sup> The University's submission noted:

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...

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. An increased number of returning graduates from scholarship programs would expand Australia's networks in Mexico and encourage partnerships.<sup>47</sup>

4.38 According to Universities Australia's submission, the Australian government has been engaging with CONACYT to enable Mexican scholarship recipients to study at Australian universities. While CONACYT has signed agreements with a number of individual universities, Universities Australia is in consultations facilitated by government on an overarching MOU to enable future Mexican scholarship recipients to study at any Australian university of their choice.<sup>48</sup>

### **Scope to extend the New Colombo Plan to include Mexico**

4.39 The New Colombo Plan is an initiative of the Australian government which aims to lift knowledge of the Indo Pacific in Australia by supporting Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the region. The New Colombo Plan involves a scholarships program for study of up to one year, internships or mentorships and a flexible mobility grants program.<sup>49</sup>

4.40 The scholarships program allows students to undertake study in a host country for which they receive full credit at their Australian university. Mobility grants are awarded to Australian universities to support students to study and undertake work-based experiences in a host country. They are aimed at supporting long term study, internships and language acquisition.<sup>50</sup>

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46 Professor Tyrone Carlin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Sydney, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2015, p. 33.

47 University of Sydney, *Submission 23*, p. 4.

48 Universities Australia, *Submission 33*, p. 4.

49 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *New Colombo Plan*, <http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/pages/new-colombo-plan.aspx>, (accessed 10 November 2015).

50 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *New Colombo Plan*, <http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/mobility-program/Pages/mobility-program.aspx>, (accessed 10 November 2015).

4.41 Submitters proposed that the Australian government consider extending the New Colombo Plan to include Latin America and Mexico in particular.<sup>51</sup> During the public hearing, Professor Carlin also noted that:

... [New Colombo scholarships] are concentrated in Asia, as you know, and they have been enormously successful. And in terms of getting more of our students out as ambassadors, and forging those relationships, we believe that the extension of a program like that into the Latin American zone could be very beneficial.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Committee View***

4.42 The committee agrees with submitters that Australia must compete more vigorously for international student flows from Latin America and in particular Mexico. As the Mexican government awards its scholarships to countries with a similar level of interest, Australia and its higher education providers would benefit from extending the New Colombo Plan to include Mexico or Latin America as this would likely see an increase in returned scholarships. The committee believes extending the New Colombo Plan to include Mexico as a host country would encourage greater student flows between Australia and Mexico and be a worthwhile expansion of the initiative.

### **Recommendation 7**

**4.43 The committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade consider whether there is scope to extend the New Colombo Plan to include Mexico as a destination country.**

### **Educational infrastructure challenges**

#### ***Insufficient panel physicians***

4.44 Panel physicians are approved by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) to perform medical examinations on all international student applicants.<sup>53</sup> There are only three panel physician service locations for all of Mexico, one each in the cities of Mexico City, Guadalajara and Ciudad Juarez, with between one and six physicians in each location.<sup>54</sup> Submitters noted that this creates a bottleneck for processing international student visas, which in turn restricts student mobility and decreases Australia's appeal as an education destination.

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51 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 26; University of Sydney, *Submission 23*, p. 4; Mr Victor Pertou, *Submission 25*, p. 4.

52 Professor Tyrone Carlin, University of Sydney, *Committee Hansard*, 29 October 2015, p. 33.

53 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Panel Physicians*, <https://www.border.gov.au/Busi/Pane/Pane>, (accessed 10 November 2015).

54 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Panel Physicians by Country*, <https://www.border.gov.au/Lega/Lega/Help/Location/mexico>, (accessed 25 November 2015).

4.45 The ANZMEX Business Council explained in their submission:

This lack of soft infrastructure puts Australia at a distinct disadvantage to its competitors, sometimes adding as much as \$1000 to the cost of some students studying in Australia due to their need to pay for flights, accommodation and incidental costs so that they can attend an appointment at the location of the panel doctor. During peak application periods, prospective students can wait as long as three weeks to have an appointment confirmed, and another month before actually being able to visit the doctor. When you consider that the student visa cannot be processed until the doctor's report is submitted, the entire process can stretch to three months.<sup>55</sup>

#### *Committee view*

4.46 It is the committee's view that placing additional physicians in the three current service locations (Mexico City, Guadalajara and Ciudad Juarez) as well as providing additional service locations in key feeder cities, such as Monterrey, would alleviate delays in student visa applications and contribute to increasing student flows between Australia and Mexico.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**4.47 The committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection appoint additional panel physicians in key Mexican cities to reduce delays to international student medical examinations.**

#### *Prolonged student visa application times*

4.48 A further challenge in developing Australia as an education destination for Mexican students is that the current visa process for prospective students, which was described by submitters as cumbersome and protracted. Australia has a number of visas available to international students, dependent on the expected type of study, including:

- Independent ELICOS (Subclass 570);
- Schools (Subclass 571);
- Vocational Education and Training (Subclass 572);
- Higher Education (Subclass 573);
- Postgraduate Research (Subclass 574);
- Non-award (Subclass 575); and
- Foreign Affairs or Defence (Subclass 576).<sup>56</sup>

4.49 DIBP considers each student visa application on its individual merits. Each applicant's visa requirements are determined using assessment levels to ensure

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55 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 23.

56 Study in Australia, *Visa Information*, <http://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/global/apply-to-study/visas>, (accessed 11 November 2015).

fairness and consistency. There are three assessment levels in the student visa program which align student visa requirements to the immigration risk posed by applicants from a particular country studying in a particular education sector.<sup>57</sup>

4.50 Assessment Level 1 represents the lowest immigration risk and Assessment Level 3 the highest. The higher the assessment level, the greater the evidence an applicant is required to demonstrate to support their claims for the grant of a student visa.<sup>58</sup> As at November 2015, all visa subclasses for Mexican passport holders were listed as Assessment Level 1.<sup>59</sup>

4.51 For eligible students, the DIBP also offers a streamlined visa processing arrangement where visa applicants are subject to lower evidentiary requirements, similar to Assessment Level 1, irrespective of the passport they hold. Students must meet certain requirements to be eligible for streamlined processing and hold a Confirmation of Enrolment with a participating education provider.<sup>60</sup>

4.52 Submitters suggested a number of improvements could be made to Australia's student visa process. The ANZMEX Business Council explained:

Currently Mexicans are not eligible to apply for eVisas or the EST visa – we would argue that if Australia is serious about welcoming Mexican business people, tourists and students we should use avenues which are already in place for other strategic partners of Australia. In addition we would urge that the Department of Immigration be sufficiently resourced to reduce the time taken to process visas for Mexicans to visit Australia from the current 4–6 week time frame to a more realistic 2-week time frame. We believe that having inspectors who are fluent in Spanish, and are specifically responsible for liaising with the Australian Embassy immigration team in Mexico would be of great assistance in addressing problems.<sup>61</sup>

4.53 Submitters noted that the student visa process can also be compounded by the delay in panel physician appointments as previously discussed. The ANZMEX Business Council recommended that DIBP be further resourced so that student visa applicants are assigned a Spanish speaking inspector as a primary point of contact.<sup>62</sup>

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57 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Student Visa Assessment Levels*, <http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Stud/Stud>, (accessed 11 November 2015).

58 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Student Visa Assessment Levels*, <http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Stud/Stud>, (accessed 11 November 2015).

59 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Student Visa Assessment Levels*, <http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Stud/Stud>, (accessed 11 November 2015).

60 Department of Immigration and Border Protection, *Student Visa Assessment Levels*, <http://www.border.gov.au/Trav/Stud/Stre>, (accessed 11 November 2015).

61 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 24.

62 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 26.

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### *Committee view*

4.54 The committee is aware of the need for improvements to educational infrastructure and supports the improvement of travel and visa measures for Mexican students to increase access to Australia as an education destination. Reducing student visa application times would not only increase Australia's appeal as an education destination but also improve its competitiveness in the international student market.

4.55 Allocating additional resources to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection would go some way to alleviating the bottlenecks described in submissions.

### **Recommendation 9**

**4.56 The committee recommends that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection review its current student visa provisions to reduce visa application processing times for Mexican students.**

#### *Redundant Foundation Year requirement*

4.57 Foundation Studies are designed as a pre-university year for international students who wish to obtain Australian qualifications. The Foundation Year is equivalent to Australia's Year 12 but with a special focus on English ability and preparation for tertiary studies.<sup>63</sup>

4.58 The ANZMEX Business Council told the committee that Australian universities currently require all high school graduates from Mexico, regardless of the quality of the school, to complete a Foundation Year before beginning undergraduate studies in Australia.<sup>64</sup> The ANZMEX Business Council noted that there may be scope to improve Australia's competitiveness in the international student sector by abolishing the Foundation Year requirement for graduates of key schools in Mexico. The ANZMEX Business Council reasoned:

Top candidates from top schools simply are not interested to spend this time and money when they are already at the same or higher level required and thus go elsewhere. This disincentive, combined with the paucity of scholarship or funding options for undergraduates means that Australia is simply not competing in this segment of the market. We would recommend that the Education Department examine the feasibility of ranking key Mexican secondary schools in order to facilitate direct entry for qualified students into undergraduate programs.<sup>65</sup>

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63 Foundation Studies, *Foundation Studies Australia*, <http://www.foundationstudies.com.au/>, (accessed 11 November 2015).

64 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 24.

65 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 24.

**Committee view**

4.59 It is vital that Australia is competitive in the international student sector. The committee encourages the Australian government to monitor Australian university entrance requirements to ensure that they do not unduly discourage Mexican students from studying in Australia.

**Geographical dislocation of Austrade's educational management**

4.60 Australia currently manages its educational activities for Mexico from its posts in either Brazil or Chile. There are no officers based in Mexico who are responsible for developing opportunities solely in the Mexican education sector.<sup>66</sup> The ANZMEX Business Council argued that appointing an Education Counsellor or Trade Commissioner to the Mexico City post would accelerate the development of Australian education opportunities in Mexico as well as provide a less convoluted path for Australian universities to access recruitment feedback from the area. They stated:

...recruitment feedback mechanisms to [Australian] universities are unnecessarily convoluted due to the geographical dislocation of Austrade's management structures in education. The scale of the opportunity in Mexico provides strong argument for both an Education Counsellor and an Australian-based Trade Commissioner for Education to be appointed to the Mexico City post. While the Trade Commissioner role could focus on supporting Australia to gain a stronger foothold in the recruitment of international students it could also play a fundamental role in supporting Australian institutions in developing local partnerships in order to provide education services locally.<sup>67</sup>

**Scope for increased collaboration in research**

4.61 The Australian Academy of Science advised the committee that the Mexican government 'wants to improve its standing in science and is improving funding for this sector'. The Australian Academy of Science outlined both Mexico and Australia's research strengths:

Mexico has expertise in a number of areas including agricultural sciences, aquaculture and fisheries...Mexico also has a modern and dynamic health and biotechnology industry. Mexico is the second largest pharmaceutical market in Latin America and a major producer of high-tech medicine.

Australia on the other hand has research strengths in areas such as health and medical research, mining and water management, radio astronomy, the environment, and others. It has had some substantial economic successes underpinned by science.<sup>68</sup>

4.62 Submitters noted that Australia and Mexico have research centres in areas of mutual interest and that it would be advantageous to both countries if the number of

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66 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, p. 24.

67 ANZMEX Business Council, *Submission 6*, pp 24–25.

68 Australian Academy of Science, *Submission 15*, p. 2.

collaborative research activities were increased and existing research scholarship programs extended.<sup>69</sup> The University of Sydney explained that:

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.<sup>70</sup>

4.63 The Australian Academy of Science noted that by strengthening science and technology links with countries such as Mexico, Australia can contribute and develop solutions to global challenges, such as energy security, the preservation of biodiversity, and sufficiency of food.<sup>71</sup>

4.64 Australia has a number of existing research collaborations with Mexico, such as the University of Sydney's joint research with the Mexican Institute for Water Technology and with the Mexican International Centre for the Improvement of Wheat and Maize through its Plant Breeding Institute.<sup>72</sup> The Australian Academy of Science and the Mexican Academy of Science signed a MoU in 2015 to foster mutually beneficial scientific exchanges, workshops and other joint activities.<sup>73</sup> The Department of Education and Training outlined Mexico and Australia's collaborative partnership:

Measured by joint publications, Mexico has been Australia's 46<sup>th</sup> ranked international collaboration partner with 1000 joint research publications between 2009 and 2014. In 2014, there were 234 joint publications with the most common fields of research being astronomy and astrophysics; physics, particles and field; and plant sciences and ecology. Australia only accounts for approximately 4 per cent of Mexico's international cooperation, as measured by the number of joint publications.<sup>74</sup>

4.65 Submitters noted that there is little incentive for Australian academics to publish their work in innovation, science and technology academic journals written in languages other than English. The ANZMEX Chamber of Commerce advised the committee that publishing and recognising Australian academic work in Latin

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69 Associate Professor Cesar Ortega-Sanchez, *Submission 2*, p. 1; Mrs Cynthia Gavito Paredes and Raymundo Granados Salgado, *Submission 13*, p. 1.

70 University of Sydney, *Submission 23*, p. 4.

71 Australian Academy of Science, *Submission 15*, p. 2.

72 University of Sydney, *Submission 23*, p. 4.

73 Australian Academy of Science, *Submission 15*, p. 2.

74 Department of Education and Training, *Submission 21*, pp 3–4.

American journals and vice versa would encourage research collaboration and further increase the linkages between Australia and Mexico:

It would be desirable to explore with Universities Australia the possibility of acknowledging and counting published journal papers, written in Spanish for Mexican and other Latin American academic journals authored by Australian researchers in Australian universities' [in] metrics for academic performance and considerations around academic promotion. We could accelerate the rhythm of bilateral IST collaboration if/when researchers perceive that their collaborative work with Mexico would be acknowledged and recognized Australian wide.<sup>75</sup>

### *Committee view*

4.66 The importance of scientific research and innovation cannot be overemphasised. The committee agrees that it would be advantageous to both Australia and Mexico if the number of collaborative research activities were increased and existing research scholarship programs extended. The committee commends the Australian Academy of Science and the Mexican Academy of Science for the MoU to foster mutually beneficial scientific exchanges, workshops and other joint activities signed this year.

### **Recommendation 10**

**4.67 The committee recommends that the Australian government actively encourage research collaboration between Australia and Mexico and that more resources be made available to Australian universities and research institutions to facilitate this collaboration.**

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75 ANZMEX Chamber of Commerce, *Submission 8*, p. 8.