

Inquiry into Funding for public research into foreign policy issues
Written questions on notice for University of Melbourne Peacebuilding Initiative

Written QoNs from Senator Kitching

- Would you utilise a reciprocal secondment scheme with relevant government agencies?

Our inclination would be to engage in a reciprocal secondment scheme. At present, the Initiative for Peacebuilding is a small unit, so it would depend on the tasks waiting to be undertaken and the capacities of the person considering the secondment.

- What measures do you take to ensure the independence, and perception of independence, of your research?

The University of Melbourne expects the highest ethical standards from its students and staff in all areas of their academic work and professional behaviour. The principled practice of independence, impartiality and the maintenance of academic integrity involves high quality scholarly practices, the use of reputable sources of information and the full acknowledgement of the authors and creators of ideas and materials that have informed one's research.

- Do you take any measures to avoid politicisation of your work?

The University of Melbourne has clear policies and practices that guide research and engagement and accountability pathways for academic work and professional behaviour – and include the avoidance of biases. All our research has been and will continue to be undertaken by professional researchers of high ethical standards. This does not mean that they do not have opinions or a place in critical debates on a wide range of social and political policy issues – especially given the focus on research into foreign affairs. We conduct rigorous research which is relevant to policy development, but it would be incorrect to describe that as politicisation if that is perceived as support for one party.

- What is your response to criticisms that there is insufficient diversity in foreign policy research outputs?

There is considerable diversity in the analysis, expression and discussion of Australian foreign policy when all the forms of research translation are taken into account. The growth of online channels specialising in or including discussion of foreign policy has multiplied avenues for debate about international relations. The relatively new journal *Australian Foreign Policy* is a valuable addition to published sources of evaluative discussion. There is, however, a lack of foreign policy research outputs that focus on or elevate solutions or possible pathways to addressing conflict and building peace and security. Across the various existing mediums increased outputs that offer diverse perspectives especially from partnering countries on important foreign policy issues would enrich these.

- Some consider that think tanks focus too much on commentary rather than original research. What is your view?

Both are important and connected. Commentary on specific issues often empirically driven – especially from universities is normally of considerable value. Commentary also receives wider audience readership than traditional forms of research outputs for original research such as scholarly journals. There can be no doubt that many important aspects of Australian international relations receive too little original research attention, and that is coupled with the constraints on research funding for original research. We believe there would be substantial value in more sustained inquiry into understanding contemporary drivers of conflict in the Asia Pacific region and how Australia is best placed to support approaches to transforming these as part of foreign policy.