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Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
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Go8 Submission on the Australia-Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement

The Group of Eight (Go8) thanks DFAT for the opportunity to comment on the Australia-Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement. Please note that this submission represents the views of the Go8 network. Member universities may also make their own, more detailed submissions.

The Go8 represent Australia's eight leading research-intensive universities. As a collective, we:¹

- Are consistently the highest ranked Australian universities across the major international ranking systems (Academic Ranking of World Universities; the Times Higher Education World University Rankings; and the QS World University Rankings);
- Educate one in three international students who choose to study higher education onshore in Australia;
- Account for more than half of all Australian papers with international collaboration; and
- Attract industry research funding that is twice that of the rest of the sector combined.

Much of this success rests on the Go8's capacity to engage extensively with international partners, both in our region and around the globe.

International engagement builds Australia's reputation for high quality research and education; connects Australia's best minds with those from around the world; helps our students to develop the intercultural skills necessary to the 21st century's global workforce; and builds soft power capacity by demonstrating our commitment to being an engaged and active regional partner. All of these factors underpin and support Australia's international relationships at the broader, national level.

However, as we have seen occurring in Hong Kong in recent weeks, these kinds of partnerships are increasingly coming under threat from broader geo-political tensions outside the control of the higher education and research sectors.

¹ Go8 Facts of Distinction, <https://go8.edu.au/go8-publication-facts-of-distinction-2019>



Hong Kong represents the 9th largest source market for international, onshore higher education enrolments at the sector level, and 6th largest source market for the Go8 universities.²

There were 12,723 enrolments from Hong Kong nationals in the Australian education sector as of May 2019 (YTD), an increase of 31% since May 2013 (9,689 enrolments). Just under a third of these (63%; 7,982) were in higher education, and half of those (4,060; 51%) were at a Go8 university.

And DFAT reports that these education exports to Hong Kong were worth around \$780 million in 2018.³

All of this becomes potentially at risk when rising tensions across the region spill over into demonstrations and civil unrest.

The Go8 considers agreements such as the A-HKFTA to be particularly important in challenging times, by providing a clear and high level symbol of Australia's commitment to our regional partners.

Provisions contained in the Australia-Hong Kong FTA (AHK-FTA) include:⁴

- Under A-HKFTA, Hong Kong has locked in its current regime for education services, with a guarantee that Australian providers will be able to take advantage of opportunities created through further market reforms.
- Australia and Hong Kong have agreed to enhance cooperation between educational institutions and relevant government agencies in the areas of quality assurance, recognition of qualifications, online education, distance education and blended learning models.

The Go8 regards these as positive steps towards deepening the education relationship between Australia and Hong Kong. We therefore support the ratification of this agreement.

If you wish to explore any of these issues in more detail, please contact the Go8 office via email (chief.executive@go8.edu.au) or phone (02 6175 0700).

Yours sincerely

VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

² All enrolment data is current as of YTD May 2019, and was supplied by Australian Education International (AEI).

³ <https://dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/not-yet-in-force/a-hkfta/a-hkfta-outcomes/Pages/a-hkfta-outcomes-services.aspx>

⁴ <https://dfat.gov.au/trade/agreements/not-yet-in-force/a-hkfta/a-hkfta-outcomes/Pages/a-hkfta-outcomes-services.aspx>