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18 March 2022

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
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**Go8 Submission to the Free Trade Agreement between Australia
and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

The Group of Eight (Go8), representing Australia's leading research-intensive universities, thanks the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCT) for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Please note that this submission represents the views of the Go8 network, and member universities may choose to make their own submissions.

Please note that we are happy for this submission to be published and have no wish for any of it to be treated as confidential.

The Go8 member universities:¹

- Are consistently the highest ranked Australian universities across the major international ranking systems, with seven of our members ranked in the top 100 in the world, and all ranked in the top 150 universities in the world (according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, the Times Higher Education Rankings (THES) and the QS World University Rankings (QS)).
- Educate over 150,000 international students both on and offshore.
- Support more than 73,000 jobs in Australia through our international students.
- Generate \$1 million in economic impact for every three Go8 international students.
- Account for more than half of all collaborative Australian research papers.
- Attract research funding from industry and other non-government sources that is twice that of the rest of the sector combined.

As noted to JSCT in previous submissions, this success reflects our extensive international connections, both within our region and around the globe.

¹ https://go8.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Go8-Facts-of-Distinction_web.pdf



International connections underpin higher education and research excellence in a number of ways:

- Facilitate research and academic connections between the top researchers and educators from around the globe, helping to accelerate the advancement of human knowledge and understanding;
- Help to ensure Australian engagement in key international policy conversations, such as through the Go8's relationships with our counterpart organisations in the UK (Russell Group), US (Association of American Universities), Europe (League of European Research Universities), Canada (Universities 15), Germany (Universities 15), Japan (Research Universities 11), and the Association of East Asian Universities (AEARU); and
- Help to ensure a flow of international talent into Australia, in key areas of study. The latest data from the Department of Education (DESE) indicates that, in 2019, international citizens comprised 30% of all students in higher education, including 61% of students studying in the field of information Technology, 43% of students in Engineering and Related Technologies and 30% of students in Architecture and Building.²

Indeed, we have just seen a powerful example of what the world can achieve when the best and brightest are enabled to work together for the collective good. Prior to the arrival of COVID-19, coronaviruses had largely eluded efforts to make successful vaccines.³ Now there are numerous candidates recognised by the WHO and in use across many countries.⁴

Higher education and research excellence in turn support and underpin the economy by:

- Providing the pipeline of trained professionals to fill much needed skills gaps within the knowledge economy;
- Producing the research outcomes and discoveries that fuel the development of new and critical industries such as quantum computing, AI, machine learning and advanced manufacturing; and
- Ensuring that Australia remains connected to the knowledge and innovation communities internationally to keep us both at the cutting edge of technology development and enabled to engage with developments created elsewhere.

In this context, agreements like the AU-UK FTA are an important signal between two Governments of their willingness to engage. Indeed, in this instance it has been described by the Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, as the “fastest major agreement Australia has signed and the most comprehensive and ambitious agreement we have concluded outside of New Zealand”.⁵ It is also the first full agreement that Britain has negotiated post-Brexit.⁶

This is especially relevant as the world transitions to a post-COVID reality. Following two years of lockdowns, social distancing, cancelled flights and high transmission rates, compounded by increasing geopolitical tensions, it would not be surprising if we were to see a hesitancy to re-engage, and a tendency to look more inwards than outwards.

² <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2020-section-2-all-students>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2020-04-17/coronavirus-vaccine-ian-frazer/12146616>

⁴ https://extranet.who.int/pqweb/sites/default/files/documents/Status_COVID_VAX_23Dec2021.pdf

⁵ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/uk-free-trade-deal-sets-us-firmly-on-road-to-recovery/news-story/3d5bbc5128e4bb5ff543d3a25f392362>

⁶ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/uk-free-trade-deal-sets-us-firmly-on-road-to-recovery/news-story/3d5bbc5128e4bb5ff543d3a25f392362>



While it is entirely appropriate to seek to benefit from the learnings of the pandemic and not automatically seek to return to a business-as-usual state, we must take care that this does not translate into disengagement from the global community of which we are all part.

The AU-UK FTA contains measures intended to, for example, allow Australian professionals to compete on an equal footing with EU nationals in the UK for the first time in 40 years. It also includes a dedicated innovation chapter, facilitating bilateral engagement on innovative technologies; and clauses encouraging the mobility of workers, including researchers, to facilitate professional engagement across both countries.

The Go8 acknowledges the recognition of universities within the Innovation Chapter as key collaborators in the innovation system, and the commitment within the FTA to further strengthening these collaborations.⁷ We also acknowledge and support the recognition of the importance of facilitating and promoting investment in research and development as part of encouraging and expanding innovation.⁸ However, we note the relative brevity of the chapter (at less than five pages), and seek greater detail as to the mechanisms by which the Strategic Innovation Dialogue is intended to promote the measures listed around emerging technologies and facilitating trade in related products and services.

The Go8 would welcome a dialogue with Government to clarify how research-intensive universities could use the provisions of this chapter to advance and deepen collaborations with UK partners in advancing innovation goals, particularly in the area of emerging technologies.

Go8 and Russell Group Discussions on the FTA

The Boards of the Go8 and Russell Group, the leading bodies for the research-intensive universities in Australia and the UK, met on the 31 January 2022 to consider how to leverage the opportunities presented by the signing of this agreement to further extend our already existing research and academic connections.

As a result of that meeting, the Chairs of the Go8 (Professor Margaret Gardner AC, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University) and the Russell Group (Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, Vice-Chancellor, University of Manchester) sent a joint letter to the respective Trade Ministers (The Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Trade; and the Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade) and Foreign Affairs Ministers (Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs; and the Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs) in both countries notifying them of the outcome of the discussion. These included agreement to:

- **Pursue a strategic alliance on research and innovation:** eg., to harness the capability of our world leading researchers in critical areas such as AI, quantum, clean tech and health, supported by bilateral funding programs.
- **Student and researcher mobility:** fast-tracking researcher exchange, joint PhD programs and reciprocal schemes to support young career researcher mobility.
- **Commercialisation:** facilitating engagement between researchers and industry partners across the two countries, specifically to support both governments in developing a proposed innovation dialogue.

⁷ Innovation Chapter 20-3(3).

⁸ Innovation Chapter 20-4(2)(e).



- **Cutting bureaucracy:** eg., through shared IP and data sharing agreements.

A copy of that letter is provided with this submission.

The Go8 therefore sees much benefit in the AUK-UK FTA, and supports this agreement.

Recommendation: That JSCOT recommend that the Australian Parliament support legislation to secure this treaty.

Yours sincerely

VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



3 February 2022

The Rt Hon Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP
Secretary of State for International Trade and
President of the Board of Trade
Department for International Trade
Old Admiralty Building, Admiralty Place
London SW1A 2DY

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and
Development Affairs and Minister for Women and
Equalities
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH

Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ministers,

We are writing to you in our roles as the Chairs of the Group of Eight (Go8) and the Russell Group, the leading bodies for the research-intensive universities in Australia and the UK respectively. Both the Go8 and the Russell Group are key contributors to the high-quality research that is fundamental to countries seeking to remain competitive as we move into a post-pandemic future.

Research is a foundation of economic and industry success in an increasingly technologically driven 21st century. It is also critical to helping us understand and navigate the complex dynamics of more diverse, multicultural and heterogenous societies. This will be crucial to help maintain social cohesion as we move into an era of geopolitical change.

That is why it is more important than ever to deepen our existing partnerships with like-minded countries, and leverage opportunities such as the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and trilateral AUKUS partnership.

To this end, the Boards of the Go8 and the Russell Group met on 31 January 2022 to explore the opportunity presented by the UK-Australia FTA negotiations to successfully consolidate, extend, and leverage our existing collaborative connections.

The Go8 and Russell Group have pledged our commitment to work together to increase two-way research collaboration, including increasing commercialisation activity, and building on our status as trusted partners in areas of sensitive research. To further this ambition, our aim is to explore how this can be used to increase two-way trade and investment and strengthen our economies.

We also discussed mechanisms by which the above outcomes might be achieved, to the mutual benefit of both of our countries. These include:

- **A strategic alliance on research and innovation:** The UK and Australia would be well placed to create a strategic alliance on research and innovation. This could involve agreeing a shared research agenda with priority topics based on shared national priorities, and the creation of bilateral funding programmes. Universities in both our groups undertake world-leading research in the fields of AI, quantum, clean tech and health disciplines, for example, and we will explore how these can be leveraged to the advantage of both countries.



- **Student and researcher mobility:** Facilitating and fast-tracking researcher exchange between the two countries will strengthen our respective talent pipelines and reinforce our strong cultural ties. It also has obvious benefits in progressing the objectives and goals of the AUKUS alliance. We would be keen to explore reciprocal schemes for exchange and funding options to support young researchers e.g., through joint PhDs and early-career researcher sabbaticals. In particular, we would like to see opportunities to enhance the two-way flow of postdoctoral researchers as our experience suggests this can often lead to enhanced opportunities for engagement with industry.
- **Commercialisation:** Removing barriers and facilitating engagement between researchers and also potential industry partners across the two countries, specifically to support both governments in developing the proposed innovation dialogue to mutual benefit.
- **Cutting bureaucracy:** for example, through the development of shared IP and data sharing agreements, through joint opportunities to contribute to public procurement and how to minimise travel restrictions.

In line with these key opportunities linked to the FTA, we will establish a joint Go8-Russell Group committee to further develop these ideas. We expect this committee to have its first meeting in the next few weeks.

We would be pleased to meet with you, relevant members of your team or the High Commissioners of our two countries, to discuss how these outcomes might be progressed. In the meantime, for any questions you might have, please do not hesitate to contact the Chief Executives of our groups who would be pleased to arrange a mutually convenient time:

- Vicki Thomson, Chief Executive of the Go8, can be contacted through her Chief Operating Officer, Ms Tracey Hinchley, (e: tracey.hinchley@go8.edu.au; p: +61 2 5123 6701).
- Dr Tim Bradshaw, Chief Executive of the Russell Group, can be contacted through his Executive Personal Assistant, Ms Debbie Halpenny (e: CEO.Office@russellgroup.ac.uk; +44 020 3816 1300).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Margaret Gardner AC
Chair Group of Eight, Vice-Chancellor and President
Monash University

Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell
Chair Russell Group, Vice-Chancellor
University of Manchester