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Go8 Submission to the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (AI-ECTA)

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

The Go8 member universities:

- Are consistently the highest ranked Australian universities across the major international ranking systems. Seven of our members have just had their places in the top 100 of the prestigious Academic Ranking of World Universities confirmed, with two now appearing in the top 50.¹
- Have strong international connections and relationships, educating over 150,000 international students both on and offshore.
- Account for more than half of all collaborative Australian research papers and attract research funding from industry and other non-government sources that is twice that of the rest of the sector combined.

The Go8's focus and proven track record in education and research excellence has led to the formation of deep and long-lasting global relationships, especially with key strategic nations like India.

- Go8 universities produced around 7,721 co-publications with India between 2017 and 2021, representing around 53 per cent of all Australian-Indian co-publications during this time.²
- The collaborations were in areas such as Clinical Medicine, Physics, Chemistry, Engineering, Materials Science and Space Science.³

¹ <https://www.shanghairanking.com/rankings/arwu/2022>

² Extracted from the InCites database, 17 August 2022.

³ Extracted from the InCites database, 17 August 2022.



Our universities have also invested in longer term, research capacity building initiatives, aimed at fostering top research talent through PhD mobility programs. These include:

- The Monash-IITB Research Academy:⁴ established in 2008, the Academy is a collaboration between Monash University and the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay for PhD training. Students spend time studying at both IITB and Monash University and graduate with a joint degree. Projects are conducted around seven themes, driven by industry need and addressing global challenges. These include infrastructure engineering; clean energy; water; nanotechnology; biotechnology and stem cell research; advanced computational engineering, simulation and manufacture; and humanities and social sciences.
- UQIDAR:⁵ A joint PhD program run by the University of Queensland and the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. As with the Monash-IITB Research Academy, students spend time in both countries and receive a joint degree. Projects are multidisciplinary. All students are offered a scholarship to allow them to focus on their research.
- Melbourne India Postgraduate Academy (MIPA):⁶ a joint initiative consisting of established researchers and PhD students from the University of Melbourne and elite Indian institutions including the Indian Institute of Technology Madras; the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur; Indian Institute of Science Bangalore; Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur; and the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Tirupati.
- The Go8-India PhD Advisory Taskforce: This taskforce was formed in 2017 to identify the barriers to PhD mobility between Australia and India, and develop recommendations aimed at addressing these. It was co-chaired by the (then) Go8 Chair Professor Peter Høj and Professor Devang Khakar (then Director of the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay) and comprised representatives from the Indian higher education sector and industry. The taskforce produced a report outlining their findings and recommendations in 2017.⁷

Initiatives such as these demonstrate the Go8's ongoing commitment to investing in the future of the Australia-India relationship, to fostering people to people connections and developing emerging talent in both nations to ensure we are in a strong position to meet shared future challenges.

The AI-ECTA includes provisions to allow Indian students who graduate with a first-class Honours in STEM or ICT areas to work in Australia for three years, extended from two.⁸ The Go8 supports this measure as consistent with our history of supporting skills exchange between our two nations, and as needed to address skills gaps in the Australian workforce.

The Go8 has recently advocated for the introduction of a High Potential Individual (HPI) visa, similar to that recently announced in the United Kingdom.⁹ The new UK visa category is designed to encourage recent graduates of universities ranked in the top 100 universities in the world in two of the three major ranking systems to fast track into the British workforce.¹⁰

⁴ <https://www.iitbmonash.org/about-the-academy/>

⁵ <https://uqidar.org/>

⁶ <https://research.unimelb.edu.au/research-at-melbourne/melbourne-india-postgraduate-academy>

⁷ https://go8.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Go8-PhD-Taskforce-Report_FINAL.pdf

⁸ Contained in a side letter to the agreement

⁹ <https://go8.edu.au/report-supporting-australias-international-education-and-research-sector>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/high-potential-individual-visa>



An Australian HPI would make a valuable contribution to further strengthening ties with like-minded nations such as India, while at the same time supplementing the existing post graduate study rights access by targeting high achieving graduates in areas of Australia's workforce need.

In addition to helping address the current workforce crisis, building a strong bilateral research pipeline will foster productive collaborative relationships, innovative ideas and commercialisation outcomes which will deliver the impact and benefits necessary for a knowledge economy.

These include a changing climate, the rise of new diseases, antibiotic resistance, food and water security, geopolitical tensions, artificial intelligence and machine learning.

The Go8 recommends that the role of innovation and commercialisation, which will underpin the productivity gains and economic prosperity of both nations be acknowledged in the AI-ECTA.

Discoveries, once created, need to be translated and commercialised in order to have an impact. This helps to drive the innovation critical to boosting productivity

Australia and the UK recently committed to including an innovation chapter in the Australia-UK FTA to provide a mechanism to discuss the impact of innovation on trade, including regulatory approaches, commercialisation of new technologies, and supply chain resilience, and ensure that the agreement remains fit for purpose into the future.

The inclusion of an innovation chapter, which would also support the movement of innovators and early career researchers and enhance the research pipeline between Australia and India, would help to drive innovation and commercialisation, leading to increased productivity and economic growth.

Agreements such as the AI-ECTA also play an important role in signalling a willingness and commitment between two nations to engage. This encourages broader engagement unlocking capacity for Australian industry, including the higher education and research sector, to expand its reach and influence in the world's fastest growing economy. The Go8 is not a newcomer to engagement with India – as outlined above our member universities have been actively engaged in fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between the two nations for many years. The AI-ECTA demonstrates a new level of commitment that can assist to facilitate further and deeper engagement.

The Go8 is committed to capitalising on the opportunities presented by the AI-ECTA and working with Government to realise the full potential of this important agreement.

Yours sincerely



VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE