

# PLuS ALLIANCE

ARIZONA STATE  
UNIVERSITY

PHOENIX

KING'S COLLEGE  
LONDON

LONDON

UNSW SYDNEY

SYDNEY

22 September 2020

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade

Department of the Senate

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

AUSTRALIA

## AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS (STATE AND TERRITORY ARRANGEMENTS) BILL 2020

Dear Committee Secretary,

Australian universities are among the best in the world. This reputation has been hard won. They have succeeded in developing outstanding potential within Australia, and attracting top talent from abroad in a fiercely competitive global environment. They have reflected well Australia's open and welcoming society. Just like the top universities in North America and Europe, they are not emanations of the state. They are autonomous and intellectually independent.

The PLuS Alliance is built on that solid foundation. It is a unique global alliance between UNSW Sydney, Arizona State University and King's College London. It is a global player in innovation in university education and knowledge exchange, with interests in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, India, Indonesia and sub-Saharan Africa. It is currently launching a wholly new engineering university in London, and driving globally joined-up research in areas such as mental ill-health and the training of the healthcare workforce of the future.

None of these three world-leading universities needed prior approval from their respective governments to enter into this partnership. We fear that if the *Foreign Relations (State and Territory Agreements) Bill 2020* goes ahead in its present form then that freedom will change for Australian universities. The Bill treats universities as emanations of the state, rather than the autonomous institutions they have historically been, and as their international competitors remain.

It seeks to restrict their ability to enter into international agreements and partnerships such as the PLuS Alliance. Clause 8 gives the Government exceptional power to make further rules regarding these restrictions, but provides no assurances or limitations on its exercise.

We understand why the government might seek to co-ordinate Commonwealth and State activity involving foreign governments, but not why it is proposed to subordinate universities to the same requirements.

As the independent Global Advisory Board to the PLuS Alliance we are profoundly concerned about the potential impact of the Bill on UNSW's powerful contribution to the Alliance. And more widely, on all partnerships such as this that we see as essential in joining up networks of research-led universities around the world to address issues of global importance, and where we need Australian universities to be permitted to participate as equal partners.

We strongly urge the removal of universities altogether from the scope of the Bill.

We value the opportunity to provide this submission. The Managing Director of the PLuS Alliance, Mr Paul Ramadge, can answer any questions about these matters

Yours sincerely,

Paul Ramadge

Managing Director, the PLuS Alliance, on behalf of the PLuS Alliance Advisory Board:

**Sir Malcolm Grant (Chairman)**

**Dr Gail Kelly**

**The Hon. Charles Clarke**

**Dr Ellen Levy**