



## **Submission No 12**

### **Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Malaysia**

**Organisation:**           **Australia Vice-Chancellors' Committee**

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**Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee**  
*the council of Australia's university presidents*  
(ACN 008 502 930 - ABN 53 008 502 930)

Our Ref:

11 September 2006

Dr Margot Kerley  
Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Parliament of Australia  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: [jscfadt@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscfadt@aph.gov.au)

Dear Dr Kerley

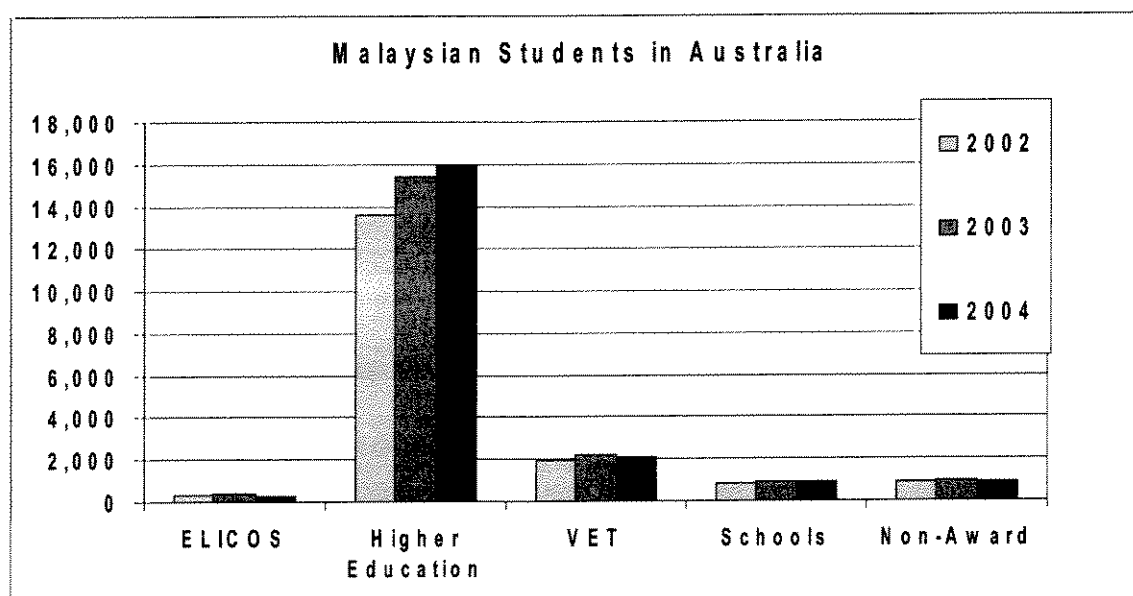
**Inquiry into Australia's Relationship with Malaysia**

Thank you for your invitation to present a submission to the Joint Standing Committee.

**A history of strong engagement**

In the context of higher education, Australia's relationship with Malaysia has a long history with links dating back to the 1950s and the Colombo Plan. The strong relationship has resulted in over 200,000 Malaysian alumni, many of whom occupy positions of responsibility and influence in government and industry today. Australian universities have played a significant role in developing and sustaining Australia's ongoing relationship with Malaysia.

In 2004, there were 16,432 Malaysians students enrolled in Australian higher education institutions onshore and 12,539 offshore. Of these students approximately 90% were enrolled at the undergraduate level with an even mix of male and female students. Malaysia is our fifth largest source for onshore international students and an important and growing market for offshore enrolments.

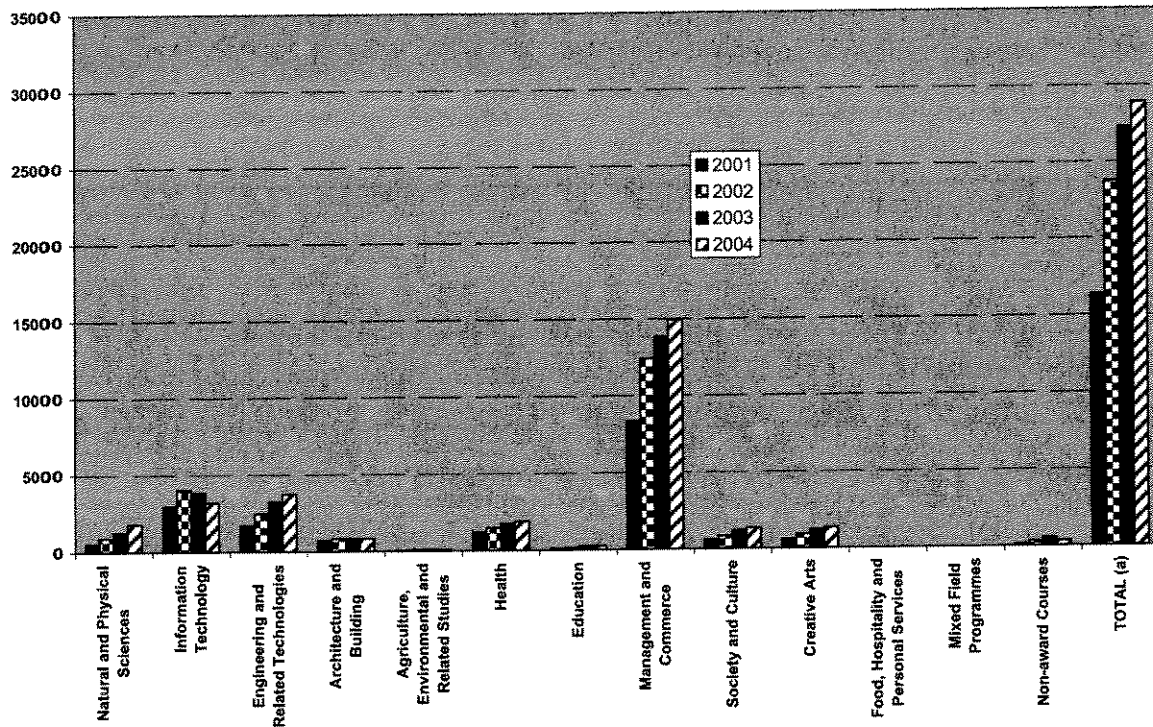


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Malaysia: Enrolments by field of study by year



Source: DEST Student Statistics 2001 - 2004

Malaysian students have traditionally travelled to Australia to study, but university twinning arrangements and Australian university campuses in Malaysia now allow Malaysian students to undertake Australian courses in Malaysia. Monash University was invited by the Malaysian Government to establish a branch campus in Malaysia, and enrolled its first intake of students in July 1998. By 2004, the campus had expanded to 2,300 students. Curtin University and Swinburne University have since also established branch campuses in Malaysia. Many Australian universities have been involved in the growth of private educational institutions in Malaysia, largely through twinning arrangements, advance standing arrangements and programs to upgrade the qualifications of Malaysian academics. These arrangements may allow Malaysian students to undertake the early years of their courses in Malaysia and to complete the latter part of their studies at an Australian campus. Further, more than 14 Australian universities have approval to provide full in-country degree programs with Malaysian partners.

Australian universities also have a large number of university to university links with Malaysian universities, including with Islamic universities. These links encourage joint research and exchange and help to further understanding and build relationships between students and academics from both cultures.

## **Terms of Reference**

International education is Australia's fourth largest export earner, and one of the most recognisable ways in which the relationship between Australia and Malaysia is strengthened and as such deserves specific mention in the terms of reference. However, the AVCC recognises that university education falls within the terms of reference covering both economic issues and scientific and cultural relations and exchange.

While recognising the export based approach to international education, it is important that the Malaysians see Australian universities as partners, not merely providers of education. Research is of immense significance and Australian universities are increasingly seeking to work collaboratively with Malaysian universities.

### **Australia Malaysia Vice-Chancellors Meeting July 2006**

The Australian-Vice Chancellors' Committee under contract to the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) co-ordinated and managed the conduct of the Malaysia Australia Vice-Chancellors Meeting 2006. This program is part of the DEST operated Regional Links Programme which aims to maintain and extend Australia's bilateral, regional and multilateral education and training activities and develop and extend the internationalisation of Australia's education and training industry.

The Malaysia Australia Vice-Chancellors Meeting 2006 involved 10 Malaysian Universities and 14 Malaysian delegates, including a representative from the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education. The meeting also involved 13 Australian Vice-Chancellors or their representatives. The strong representation from both Malaysia and Australia is an indication of the importance of these meetings and the enthusiasm for collaboration and communication in and between universities in both countries.

This meeting provided an excellent opportunity for Malaysian and Australian Vice-Chancellors to meet and discuss issues relevant to future collaboration and cooperation between Malaysian and Australian universities including staff and student mobility, credit transfer and the recognition of qualifications. It also enabled greater understanding of the developments within Malaysian and Australian universities through presentations and informed discussion.

The meeting resolved to meet again in Kuala Lumpur in 2007 to sign a Memorandum of Understanding devoted towards establishing and supporting genuine and ongoing research collaboration and opportunities for staff and student mobility between universities in both countries. It was recognised that simply signing an MOU will not be sufficient, that the will and resources must be focussed on this endeavour to ensure its success.

To this end, the AVCC and the Malaysian Vice-Chancellors' Committee resolved to lobby government through our respective Ministers for Education to establish a fund similar to those established with China and India to facilitate research collaboration and postgraduate exchange.

The AVCC has a history of working with the Malaysian Vice-Chancellors' Committee on capacity building activities. The most recent example is the Malaysian University Lecturer Upgrade Program. The aim of this program was to upgrade the qualifications of Malaysian teaching staff without losing teaching resources. The project addressed the needs of the Malaysian higher education sector, the Ministry of Education, Malaysian universities and their staff by upgrading lecturers' qualifications without the necessity of them being absent from their teaching duties. In addition the project aimed to strengthen university to university links; enhance perceptions of the quality of Australian universities; foster research networks and cooperation and encourage bilateral exchange of academic and cultural perspective

## **Bilateral Free trade Agreement**

Education is included in the ongoing Malaysia Australia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Negotiations. Given the Joint Standing Committee is no doubt informed of the ongoing work on the FTA negotiations I will only briefly outline AVCC concerns here. One of the key issues is the need for appropriate and consistent recognition of Australian qualifications, specifically the extent to which the Malaysian Public Services Department (JPA) fails to recognise degrees offered by Australian universities.

Malaysia's recognition of Australian higher education qualification occurs on a degree-by-degree and institution by institution basis. This method of assessment reduces the range of degrees that Malaysian students are prepared to take in Australia and results in significant compliance costs for Australian universities. For example, JPA only recognises 14 of Australia's 29 Bachelor of Law degrees, effectively excluding 15 universities from this aspect of the Malaysian market.

The JPA's lack of recognition of the comparability of Australian degrees with those awarded by other foreign countries is a further issue which reduces the value of the qualification obtained by the student and disadvantages Australian providers. The JPA does not distinguish between the Australian Honours Bachelor degrees and the three-year Bachelor degree with Honours offered by other foreign universities such as those in the United Kingdom. The mainstream Bachelor degree in the UK is the Honours Bachelor degree, which is usually of three years' duration. An Australian Honours Bachelor degree requires an additional year of independent research and only students with strong academic results can undertake an Honours year.

Some Malaysian private providers and employers recognise the Australian three year Bachelor degree as comparable to the overseas three year honours degree (such as the UK model). The AVCC hopes Malaysia will streamline its recognition procedures in the JPA to equate with the private sector and consider recognition of Australia's three year Bachelor degree.

### **Importance of Education in building relationships**

Student and academic mobility and exchange are seen to provide the basis for friendship, mutual respect and understanding, just as education is the key to prosperity, security and peace in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Mobility and exchange lead to increased transferability of skills and facilitate participation in the global workforce.

The importance of continuing relationship building including through two-way flows of students and staff cannot be over-emphasised. I hope that this inquiry will give due importance to the place of education within the strategic possibilities for both nations resulting from increasing globalisation and regional imperatives.

Yours Sincerely



John Mullarvey  
Chief Executive Officer