

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2004-2005 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** 3  
**Output Group:** 3.3 – AEI Group

#### DEST Question No. E160\_05

Senator Carr provided in writing

#### Question:

What are the implications of the Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement on Australia's international education activities?

Has the Department – either the International or the Higher Education Divisions – had discussions with UNSW about the guarantees of academic freedom of association it has received from the Government of Singapore?

What is the situation for an Australian university seeking to establish a campus in a country such as Singapore where these freedoms are not understood or applied as they are at home?

What laws apply? Singapore law or Australian law?

Has Singapore agreed to modify its law and regulations to allow staff and students at the UNSW campus to enjoy these freedoms as they would in Australia?

If not, how will UNSW be able to guarantee that the environment in which it provides education and research opportunities in Singapore is commensurate with that enjoyed in Australia? How will the University, or the Australian Government, guarantee the intellectual and political rights of staff and students at this campus?

#### Answer:

##### *Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement*

The Singapore – Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) further strengthens trade and investment links between Australia and Singapore and provides increased market access for Australian exporters of education services. Public education is totally excluded from the Agreement as is private primary education.

Singapore made national treatment and market access commitments for university, adult and vocational education and training with only some limited exceptions. Also, Singapore government scholarships for overseas use are now tenable at Australian universities and aspects of the administration of these scholarships that may have discouraged students from using them in Australia have been removed. As a further outcome of the FTA, the number of Australian universities whose law degrees are recognised in Singapore has now increased, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of Australian universities for students studying in this area.

The commitments made by Australia under the SAFTA exceed those made under the General Agreement on Trade in Services in that Australia agreed to provide market access in the other education services area and the adult education services area. Australia included a reservation in SAFTA on national treatment for the commercial presence mode across all

sectors, (i.e. private secondary, private higher education, other education services and adult education services).

DEST understands that the SAFTA has assisted in enabling an Australian University, the University of New South Wales (UNSW) to be the first foreign university to operate in Singapore. As part of the agreement between UNSW and Singapore, UNSW will have access to Singapore's research funding.

DEST's Higher Education Group has not had any discussions with UNSW about the Singapore Campus. However, our AEI Counsellor in Malaysia has had discussions with UNSW. In those discussions, UNSW representatives did not identify any concerns regarding academic freedom.

An Australian University or other institution establishing a campus in another country must abide by the local laws and regulations. Similarly, foreign Universities that want to establish a campus in Australia must abide by Australian laws and regulations.

The UNSW has announced that its Council will have full responsibility for the governance of its Singapore campus and that the UNSW Academic Board will approve all academic programs as well as monitoring the quality of teaching and research. This is similar to the arrangements which are in place for the UNSW's campus at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra.

The Australian Universities' Quality Agency (AUQA) audits all Australian universities on a five-yearly cycle. The AUQA's quality audits assess the adequacy of the institution's quality assurance arrangements in the key areas of teaching and learning and research and management, and comprehend all academic activities carried out in an institution's name, including overseas activities.

UNSW is scheduled to be audited in 2005, but this audit will not include the activities undertaken on the Singapore campus, which is not scheduled to enrol students until 2007.

No other Australian university has been given approval to establish a campus in Singapore. Australian universities offer over 350 programs off-shore in Singapore<sup>1</sup> through arrangements with local (non-university) partner institutions.

Should you require further information, we suggest contacting the UNSW directly.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is based on 2003 data on the AVCC website:

[http://www.avcc.edu.au/policies\\_activities/international\\_relations/internationalisation\\_initiatives/OffshorePrograms\\_AustralianUnis.pdf](http://www.avcc.edu.au/policies_activities/international_relations/internationalisation_initiatives/OffshorePrograms_AustralianUnis.pdf)