

## Chapter 9

### Coordinating public diplomacy activities—cultural and educational institutions

9.1 Public diplomacy involves not only government departments and agencies but a range of other bodies, including cultural and educational institutions whose activities can be described as 'cultural diplomacy'. This chapter looks at the role of cultural and educational institutions in public diplomacy and considers how well their activities are integrated into the government's public diplomacy framework. The committee uses the term cultural diplomacy to mean 'the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding'.<sup>1</sup>

9.2 Many commentators and numerous reviews or inquiries have expounded on the contribution that cultural diplomacy makes to enhancing a country's image and to improving its relations with other countries. They recognise that cultural diplomacy builds goodwill and helps create 'a foundation of trust' with other people.<sup>2</sup> Cultural diplomacy is able to speak a common language when formal relations are strained and to reach communities that traditional diplomacy cannot. It can open doors that would otherwise remain closed and bring people together despite political and cultural differences. In this way, cultural diplomacy is a foundation plank of public diplomacy.

#### The role of cultural institutions in Australia's public diplomacy

9.3 The committee received a number of submissions from cultural institutions all of which were fully aware of their role in building a positive image of Australia. For example, the Arts Council of Australia recognised the importance of the promotion of the arts to Australia's international reputation. It stated:

With Australia playing an ever-increasing role in the global arena from business and trade relations to environment and security issues, it is vital that Australia's 'world class' creative sector is part of the Government's

---

1 Definition taken from Milton Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Center for Arts and Culture, Washington D.C., 2003, p. 1 and used in Elizabeth Ash, Program Manager, ART in Embassies Program, U.S. Department of State and Aimee Fullman, Center for Arts & Culture, *Art as Diplomacy: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges*, 17 May 2004, p. 2; U.S. Department of State, Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, *Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*, September 2005, p. 3.

2 See for example US Department of State, *Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*, September 2005, p. 1.

broader international strategy of building a better understanding of Australia's identity, culture and values.<sup>3</sup>

9.4 DFAT similarly appreciates that international cultural relations are an integral part of the government's public diplomacy. It understands that there is a clear and definite connection between cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy. Furthermore, it accepts that government departments and agencies often rely on the achievements of cultural diplomacy to promote Australia's foreign policy objectives. DFAT's submission observed that cultural programs:

...can provide a more neutral platform for projecting an image of Australia and generating a better understanding of our values. Where audiences might be wary of more official, apparently political PD activities, CD can foster a sympathetic environment in which to pursue foreign and trade policy goals.<sup>4</sup>

9.5 As mentioned earlier, over the past few years, the JSCFADT and the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee have inquired into Australia's relations with a number of countries including Japan, China, the Republic of Korea and Indonesia. Although not focused on public diplomacy, each report has commented on the centrality of cultural exchange as a means of building strong and enduring relationships between Australia and overseas countries.

9.6 The importance of cultural links resonates through many of the submissions made to this inquiry.<sup>5</sup> Dr Gerard Vaughan, National Gallery of Victoria, noted that 'art exhibitions and the loan of works of art to promote the interests and the cultural persona of a particular country has never been stronger'.<sup>6</sup> He explained that:

...the presence in another country of great cultural objects or works of art can give tremendous focus to the culture and history of the country from which they have come.<sup>7</sup>

9.7 In this way cultural exchanges not only inform other people about the culture, creativity and ideals of a country but they help to build bridges between countries that in turn support formal diplomacy. The Art Gallery of Western Australia noted:

In places like the Indian Ocean Rim, often personal and cultural understanding is the key to advancing diplomatic and other initiatives in the area. As well, in countries where political and diplomatic relations are

---

3 *Submission 13*, p. 2.

4 *Submission 18*, p. 9.

5 See for example, National Gallery of Victoria, *Submission 6*, p. 1; Museums Australia, *Submission 12*.

6 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 36.

7 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 36.

strained, it is often possible to maintain cultural relations and use them as the way back into relationships in other areas. It is a two-way street and cultural responses in Australia to these areas are as important as any event in the Indian Ocean Rim countries.<sup>8</sup>

9.8 Making a similar point, Museums Australia cited the role museum staff had in keeping communication open and conversations going among colleagues in both East Timor and Indonesia at a time when relations between the countries were at their lowest ebb.<sup>9</sup>

9.9 The range of cultural institutions and activities with the potential to be part of Australia's public diplomacy is extensive as shown by Ms Erica Sanders, Executive Director, Museums Australia, Victoria Branch. She informed the committee that coordination of these activities would go across galleries, museums, science centres and heritage. Furthermore, she would include 'botanical gardens and national parks and the environmental heritage in that collective statement'. She stated:

They have got a lot to offer in terms of public diplomacy. The people and professionals involved with it are looking after Australia's cultural heritage. They have the stories of Australia's culture, they have the networks that capture and present a current and past Australian culture, and they are professionals in presenting and interpreting Australian culture, which is very useful in public diplomacy.<sup>10</sup>

9.10 Asialink underlined the need for all those involved in promoting Australia overseas through cultural activities to co-operate:

Collaboration between government, NGOs, universities and the private sector is now clearly identified as the way of the future as all parties share networks, expertise and experience and all benefit strategically from an enhanced image of Australia abroad.<sup>11</sup>

9.11 Clearly, the challenge for governments is to work closely with the various cultural institutions to form creative and productive partnerships that will be instrumental in achieving Australia's foreign policy objectives. The following section considers two main aspects of cultural diplomacy in Australia—the integration of cultural diplomacy into the broader public diplomacy framework and the level of government support it attracts.

9.12 The Australian Government has its own idea about the type of contribution that cultural institutions could be making to public diplomacy. Dr Strahan informed

---

8 *Submission 3*, p. 1.

9 *Submission 12*, p. 8.

10 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 30.

11 *Submission 8*, p. 1.

the committee that Australia's cultural diplomacy is guided by its foreign and trade policy objectives. He maintained that the policy 'is not to have isolated or feel-good cultural events that are not part of a thought-out strategy for moving forward these broader public diplomacy goals'.<sup>12</sup>

9.13 Although cultural institutions recognise their role in promoting Australia, their priorities may not necessarily reflect those of government. Their objectives tend to be more specific and narrow. Indeed, one of their strengths from a public diplomacy perspective is their perceived independence from government.

9.14 The Australia International Cultural Council (AICC) is one of the government's key mechanisms for ensuring that cultural diplomacy is a vital and productive component of Australia's public diplomacy. It aims to promote Australia and its cultural assets in a coordinated, targeted and innovative way.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Australia International Cultural Council**

9.15 The AICC was established in 1998 and is a consultative group chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Its objective is to project a positive image of Australia which advances Australia's foreign and trade policy interests and promotes and enhances the export of Australian cultural products.<sup>14</sup> Two of its primary functions are:

- to coordinate programs of high-quality Australian artistic presentations and collaborations overseas; and
- to enhance cooperation and coordination between government, arts and business organisations involved in promoting Australian culture overseas.<sup>15</sup>

9.16 DFAT noted that the AICC 'draws together representatives from government, the arts and cultural community and business with a common interest in more effective international showcasing of Australian arts and culture'.<sup>16</sup> It added that 'a

---

12 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 46.

13 Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/aicc/index.html> (accessed 24 May 2007) and *Submission 17*, pp. 4–5.

14 Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/aicc/index.html> (accessed 24 May 2007).

15 Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/aicc/index.html> (accessed 24 May 2007).

16 Members of the Council, (as at 24 May 2007).  
 Senator the Hon George Brandis SC, Minister for Arts and Sport  
 Mr Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, Associate Managing Director, Transfield Holdings Pty Ltd  
 Ms Kate Brennan, Chief Executive Officer, Federation Square  
 Ms Gillian Bird, Deputy Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade  
 Mr Geoff Buckley, Managing Director, Tourism Australia

senior officials group—comprising DFAT, the Australia Council, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Austrade, the Australian Film Commission, Tourism Australia and a representative of State and Territory Arts agencies—advises the Council'.<sup>17</sup>

9.17 According to DFAT, the AICC 'supports and funds Australian cultural campaigns in priority countries in Asia, North America and Europe'. These focus programs run over several months to two years and involve a wide range of activities.<sup>18</sup>

9.18 The Australia Council for the Arts (the Australia Council) is another major body that has a role in coordinating the promotion of Australian arts.

### **The Australia Council for the Arts**

9.19 The Australia Council is the Australian government's principal arts funding and advisory body. The organisation was restructured in 2005 and now comprises the office of the CEO and eight divisions.<sup>19</sup> Two of its key objectives are to invest in artistic production and the development of artistic practice and to present Australia's distinctive cultural works nationally and internationally. To this end, it supports 'the excellence, diversity and distinctiveness of Australia's arts and artists'.<sup>20</sup> According to the Council, as part of its responsibilities, it supports a range of international initiatives. It stated that it has consistently focused on 'promoting and showcasing contemporary Australian arts internationally through long-term artistic engagement for Australian artists and companies'.<sup>21</sup>

---

Ms Kathy Keele, Chief Executive Officer, Australia Council  
Mr Michael Chugg AM, Executive Chairman, Chugg Entertainment  
Mr Chris Fitchett, A/g Chief Executive, Australian Film Commission  
Ms Carol Henry, Chief Executive, Art Exhibitions Australia  
Mr Ian McRae, Consultant  
Ms Hetti Perkins, Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts, Art Gallery of NSW  
Mr Ron Radford AM, Director, National Gallery of Australia  
Mr John Stanwell, Director, artsACT  
Mr Heath Watt, A/g Chief Executive Officer, Australia Network.

The Council is chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs

17 *Submission 18*, p. 25.

18 *Submission 18*, p. 25.

19 Australia Council, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 11.

20 Australia Council, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 10.

21 Australia Council for the Arts, website, [http://www.ozco.gov.au/council\\_priorities/international/](http://www.ozco.gov.au/council_priorities/international/) (accessed 24 May 2007).

9.20 More specifically, in its Annual Report, the Council cited three programs as part of its 'taking Australian arts to the world' objective—Australian Performing Arts Market; Undergrowth: Australian Arts UK; and cultural exchange residences. With regard to the last program, the Annual Report stated that the '100 much-prized international residencies...in the past year gave artists a valuable career boost, built important world networks and contributed to the continuing evolution of Australian contemporary art'.<sup>22</sup>

9.21 The Council informed the committee that it has been an active facilitator of partnerships with key agencies to deliver international programs.<sup>23</sup> It supports the work of Asialink and noted, for example, Asialink's Arts Residency Program which supported 39 artists residencies in 12 Asian countries and the Asialink Literature Touring in Asia program.<sup>24</sup> It stated that to make certain that its work continues to maintain a highly positive interest in, and understanding of, contemporary Australia, it needs 'to ensure that all agencies responsible for promoting and profiling Australia internationally, work closely and collaboratively in their efforts to achieve long-term success'.<sup>25</sup>

### **Planning and coordination of cultural activities**

9.22 Despite the work of these two major bodies, representatives from some cultural institutions indicated that the potential to promote Australia's reputation was not fully exploited.<sup>26</sup> They believed that opportunities and possibilities were not explored.<sup>27</sup> One problem area they cited in particular concerned planning and coordination. Museums Australia argued that 'Australia's cultural endeavours in other countries are dependent—often haphazardly—on the...commitment of individuals at the local level of missions abroad. Such officers have to balance...multiple demands of the post'.<sup>28</sup> The Art Gallery of Western Australia gave the following example:

...although there have been attempts in the past to use culture to underpin initiatives with other countries during periods of exchanges for the development of trade and other relations between countries, it seems that the use of culture was at best last minute, funding was not always related to costs and timing and exploitation of the use of art exhibitions, symphony

---

22 Australia Council, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 53.

23 *Submission 13*, p. 5.

24 Australia Council, *Annual Report 2005–06*, pp. 53–54.

25 *Submission 13*, p. 5; Australia Council for the Arts, website, [http://www.ozco.gov.au/council\\_priorities/international/](http://www.ozco.gov.au/council_priorities/international/) (accessed 24 May 2007).

26 Dr Gerard Vaughan, National Gallery of Victoria, was one of a number of people who suggested that 'more can be done'. *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 36.

27 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 37.

28 *Submission 12*, p. 12.

orchestra tours, etc., were not tied strongly enough to the activities aimed at particular outcomes in such exchanges.<sup>29</sup>

9.23 Asialink added weight to the view that cultural diplomacy does not receive adequate support. It drew attention to what it termed 'a disturbing trend'—the increasing under-representation of Australia in significant regional events.<sup>30</sup> It was of the view that there is scope for greater coordination between federal agencies involved in public diplomacy and between federal and state agencies. It cited its Visual Arts Touring Program as an example of where:

...a planned and collaborative approach from DFAT's Foundations, Councils and Institutes and Cultural Relations Branch would enable us to significantly expand the reach and impact of the program through strategic regional or multilateral touring.<sup>31</sup>

9.24 The representatives from the cultural institutions identified, in particular, the lack of overarching long term strategic planning as a significant impediment to the more effective use of culture to promote Australia abroad. They could see the potential for strong cultural content to underpin Australia's diplomatic and other initiatives, but argued that it would need 'advance planning and funding in place to proceed.' In the view of the Art Gallery of Western Australia, there is an opportunity:

...to build key events and infrastructure that reflect these interests in international relations within Australia itself. To work, all of the above would have to be part of a long term strategy for the future international interests of Australia.<sup>32</sup>

9.25 Ms Helen O'Neil, Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG), also called for better strategic planning in Australia's cultural diplomacy. She told the committee:

...to make cultural diplomacy really work, we need clear, long-term strategic planning. Most of the AMPAG companies are working three years ahead, and it is no use thinking up a good idea for a culturally based event to fit in with a diplomatic event if there is just six months advance notice.

We need a plan that clearly identifies the resources and investment needed to carry out the goals it sets. There is no point in great ideas and good goals,

---

29 *Submission 3*, p.1.

30 Also mentioned in paragraph 14.43. For example, Asialink *Submission 8*, p. 1:

- Singapore Biennale 2006 had 46 Asian artists, 25 EuroAmerican, 22 others and 1 Australian;
- Shanghai Biennale 2006 had 49 Asian artists, 39 EuroAmerican, 4 others and 1 Australian;
- Taipei Biennale 2006 had 25 Asian artists, 14 EuroAmerican, and no Australians.

31 *Submission 8*, p. 6.

32 *Submission 3*, p. 2.

if you cannot actually achieve them. We also need regular checks on the effectiveness of the plan. It might be monitoring of the regard in which our work is held amongst peer groups, public opinion surveys, reviews and, of course, the return invitations. We have been attracted to a proposal floated by the former minister for the arts, Senator Kemp, for a special fund to tour performing arts...<sup>33</sup>

9.26 Ms Jane Cruickshank, Australian Film Commission, drew the same conclusion about the need for strategic planning. She stated that the 'building of audiences for Australian film needs to be more than just a one-off event'.<sup>34</sup>

9.27 Clearly, a number of cultural organisations were of the view that they had a valuable contribution to make to Australia's public diplomacy but that a lack of strategic planning in particular meant that opportunities were not fully exploited.

9.28 Dr Vaughan identified a practical example of where opportunities existed but were not taken advantage of because there were no appropriate systems in place.

...we would welcome the establishment or perhaps some further definition of a mechanism whereby the kinds of exhibitions that we put on overseas...could be used more by Australians: by the government of Australia, by diplomatic channels, by trade organisations. If you take that exhibition *European Masterpieces* from the National Gallery in Melbourne, 200,000 people came to see the show in Portland, Oregon, for example. Wouldn't it have been fantastic if somehow that had all coincided with a trade mission or some Australian events that might have taken place in Portland, Oregon?

We want to do a bit of business in Los Angeles. We want to try and raise some money from expats in America because we want to start buying more contemporary American art for our collection, and we think that perhaps a visit to Los Angeles and New York at some point in the future would be great. How much we would value the opportunity to tag along with that Australia in Los Angeles Week, for example. So many things happen. Perhaps we could have a presence there and have some events and see whether we could perhaps get a few Aussies living in the US or a few Americans who do business in Australia to think about supporting our fund

---

33 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, pp. 49-50.

34 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, pp. 18-19. She went on to state: 'We need a long-term strategy on where we are targeting Australian film, if that is to do with public diplomacy as well. For instance, we were talking about South Korea, where we are looking at doing quite a large festival in early 2008. Apart from the Embassy Roadshow, which comes in through the embassy or the posts in that country, there is very little highlight on Australian film. On the other side of the coin, Korean film is building quite an audience in Australia. So to do that exchange would take us a number of years to build it. A one-off event gets people excited about it once and then it goes away and comes back. It would be a longer term strategy in building audiences in targeted countries'.



for contemporary American art, because we need to get more of it into the collection. It is that kind of thing. We do feel that there are great opportunities all the time, but we do not really have systems in place to take advantage of it.<sup>35</sup>

9.29 Taking up this point, Ms Carroll, Asialinks Arts, noted that DFAT officers are fantastic but that cultural diplomacy is not their focus which often shows. She particularly mentioned that they are 'often moving through' and added:

There are reasons for that, and often very good reasons, but one of the problems is continuity and the long-term relationships that you do build in this area. If there were a capacity to have it more centralised with some proper funding then everybody would commit to that. I cannot speak for the states. Everyone, I am sure, would commit to that because I think everyone in my area acknowledges that it is an area we do not do well enough in.<sup>36</sup>

9.30 Museums Australia suggested that most countries operate through one international agency when pursuing cultural presentations outside of their own country. It recommended that a dedicated national organisation or agency be created to coordinate and manage Australian cultural presentations abroad. It gave the example of the British Council, Germany's Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (IFA) and France's Association Française d'Action Artistique (AFAA).

9.31 It should be noted that, in the May 2007 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$20.4 million over four years to enhance Australia's cultural diplomacy and improve market access for Australia's cultural exports. This budget allocation will be implemented through the AICC. This increase in funding is discussed in chapter 14.

### ***Committee view***

9.32 The committee notes the observations made by a number of representatives from cultural institutions that there is scope for better and more effective coordination between the institutions and government agencies involved in the overseas promotion of Australian culture. It is also aware of the criticism that, at the moment, there is a lack of long-term strategic planning which means that cultural institutions are not able to take full advantage of opportunities to showcase Australian art and culture and to contribute more effectively to Australia's public diplomacy.

9.33 The committee believes that there should be closer liaison between the IDC and the AICC in order to encourage better coordination and cooperation between cultural institutions and relevant government agencies in the area of public diplomacy. A stronger, more accountable IDC, as envisaged in the committee's Recommendation 6, should result in cultural institutions being recognised in the government's long-term

---

35 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, pp. 39–40.

36 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 11.

strategic planning and in better collaboration between these institutions and relevant government agencies, especially overseas posts. A number of key departments having dual membership of the IDC and the AICC could be a practical way to ensure that the interests of cultural institutions were represented in the main coordinating body for public diplomacy and that communication between the two groups was regular and focused.

9.34 The committee also suggests that, in light of the concerns raised by the cultural institutions, especially the need for longer-term strategic planning, the AICC review its responsibilities, functions and performance in this area. Having considered evidence relating to the coordination and planning of international cultural activities, the Council then report on its deliberations and findings that would be made available to the committee and also made public by publishing them on DFAT's and the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts' website.

### **Recommendation 9**

**9.35 The committee recommends that the AICC take note of the evidence relating to the coordination and planning of international cultural activities with a view to addressing the concerns raised in evidence. Close consultation with the relevant sections in the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, DFAT and Australia's cultural institutions would be central to AICC's consideration. The committee suggests that a report of the Council's deliberations and decisions be made available to the committee and also made public by publishing them on DFAT's' and the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts' websites (also see recommendation 6).**

### **Recommendation 10**

**9.36 The committee recommends further that the government consider that the AICC be co-chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Arts and Sports. The committee suggests that this would contribute significantly to greater coordination and cooperation in the area of cultural diplomacy.**

9.37 The committee draws attention to the call by NGOs, particularly cultural institutions and universities, for a better industry framework. Many believe that their efforts to contribute to Australia's public diplomacy are undermined by a system that does not take full advantage of the complementarities that exist between the many organisations that engage in public diplomacy.

9.38 Recommendation 9 would alert the AICC and relevant departments to the absence of long term strategic planning that continues to frustrate and disappoint cultural institutions endeavouring to take Australian art and culture to the world. The recommendation would not, however, tackle the practical problems of ensuring that the activities of government agencies, particularly the overseas posts, and cultural institutions complement one another. The committee believes that there is a need for a formal institutional structure to provide the necessary framework for the long term planning and coordination of cultural activities overseas.

9.39 It suggests the establishment of a modest unit in DCITA that would be the central point of contact for all cultural institutions planning overseas activities. The committee believes that this unit should have responsibilities similar to that of the IAB in DFAT. It would advise and inform the arts and diplomatic communities about proposed cultural events and help coordinate, where necessary, overseas cultural activities. It would act as an effective conduit between the arts and diplomatic communities to ensure that opportunities to promote Australia's interests through culture are fully exploited.

### **Recommendation 11**

**9.40 The committee recommends that the government establish a small but specifically tasked cultural and public diplomacy unit in the Department for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. In liaison with DFAT, the unit would provide the necessary institutional framework to ensure that Australia's cultural institutions are well placed and encouraged to take full advantage of opportunities to contribute to Australia's public diplomacy.**

### **Public diplomacy and the education sector**

9.41 The committee has highlighted the important role that Australia's educational institutions have in public diplomacy. In chapter 7, it mentioned specific programs such as the Australian Leadership Awards Program that have been, and continue to be, highly successful in boosting Australia's reputation overseas and generating goodwill toward the country. As noted earlier, graduates from these programs return to their homes better informed about, and well-disposed toward, Australia. They go on to build careers in all walks of life and make ideal ambassadors for Australia.

9.42 The committee also referred to seminars, conferences and 'conversations' held by Australian educational institutions that provide opportunities for foreign students, post-graduates, professionals and specialists to come together to discuss issues of shared importance. These meetings lay firm foundations for continuing exchange between the participants and the deepening of relationships between people of different countries. (paragraphs 7.10–7.11, 7.16–7.38).

9.43 Educational institutions, however, offer many other and diverse means to nurture people-to-people links. Professor Joseph Siracusa, RMIT, spoke of the opportunities offered through university programs for Australian students to be actively engaged in promoting Australia. He gave the example of 80 young Australians who were working on designs with 80 young counterparts in Ho Chi Minh City:

For the next 26 weeks, they will be communicating with and getting to know each other. Groups of four will be designing certain projects which will go on display at our campus in Ho Chi Minh City and Melbourne...I could not believe that they are doing our homework for us...I did not realise that they were right at the cutting edge. They are dealing with young Vietnamese of their age and past that entire Vietnam War generation...They are doing all of our work. I said to them, '...you're doing

exactly what we want to do, which is tell the story,' and you do that through individuals. We only want government help to assist.<sup>37</sup>

9.44 He suggested that the relationship between the universities and the Australian government was symbiotic.<sup>38</sup>

9.45 Presenting the general view, Asialink noted that school education provides 'a major opportunity for Australia's public diplomacy to build and strengthen international collaboration, security and harmony into the future'.<sup>39</sup> Dr Wells, Director, Policy and Planning, RMIT University, also recognised the opportunities that universities offer to advance public diplomacy.

9.46 Although she noted that RMIT's relationship with DFAT was 'very constructive and positive', she observed that it was 'issues based and ad hoc'.<sup>40</sup> Her concern was that the current approach did not offer a broader framework for engagement that would allow opportunities to be explored.<sup>41</sup> She spoke of the context-free zone and of the ad hoc means of conversing or consulting with DFAT particularly in terms of alumni, marketing, recruitment and transnational education provision.<sup>42</sup> The matter of alumni was considered in chapter 7.

9.47 Dr Wells informed the committee that they were 'struggling with silos' and called for a 'systematic approach to industry partnerships in furthering Australian public diplomacy, with universities at the front and centre of it'.<sup>43</sup> She elaborated on her argument for a strategic and systematic approach:

...we need a different relationship with government which is more of recognising government as... a key client and a partner, because we have a very strong public benefit mission built into our activities. For me, this is not a discussion about regulation or even a discussion about pumping more money into universities—although of course we would like that; it is an argument about facilitating an active partnership with government where we have common goals.<sup>44</sup>

9.48 She suggested that 'if DEST is the government's departmental vehicle for promoting its policies around universities, there are opportunities for more of a whole-

---

37 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 28.

38 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 26.

39 *Submission 8*, p. 3.

40 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 22.

41 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 24.

42 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, pp. 22 and 25.

43 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 22.

44 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 27.

of-government approach to the contribution universities can make to advancing Australia's image abroad'.<sup>45</sup> According to Dr Wells:

It is not just a matter of our contact being ad hoc and irregular and issues based. It is also that I think the departments do not always talk to each other around their common goals and interests. There is opportunity for interagency work, but I think there is also an opportunity for DFAT to address what struck me as a bit of a vacuum in its discussion of public diplomacy when I read its annual report, and also in its submission to the inquiry, which is that it is very focused on cultural diplomacy, sporting diplomacy and political diplomacy dressed up as 'soft power', I suppose. It is not focused on industry engagement and so I would like to see an industry engagement strategy which engaged DFAT but also brought in the other agencies which have an interest in the outcomes of such a strategy—such as DEST—and which provided an overarching framework within which universities and DFAT could actually explore these opportunities in a more systematic way. At the moment the points of contact are not well understood or well known.<sup>46</sup>

9.49 RMIT drew its concerns together and recommended that the Government 'recognise and support the education industry's capacity to support public diplomacy by establishing an explicit strategic dialogue with institutions; perhaps through Australian Education International'.<sup>47</sup>

### *Committee view*

9.50 The comments made by the Australian educators appearing before the committee follow closely those put by the cultural institutions. Both cultural and educational activities involve the exchange of ideas and information. They bring people together to develop a greater understanding and mutual appreciation of different cultures and ways of life. Witnesses spoke in broad terms about how cultural and educational activities help to portray a positive image of Australia and gave specific examples drawn from personal experience of where an activity had made a difference. They were of the view, however, that the government could do more to take full advantage of their activities to promote Australia's interests overseas.

9.51 In this regard, the committee makes a similar suggestion to DFAT as it did to the AICC. It suggests that DFAT take note of the evidence presented to this committee, especially the comments and recommendations by RMIT in relation to the establishment of a better framework for industry engagement that would allow opportunities to be explored. The committee suggests that DFAT initiate and sponsor

---

45 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 24.

46 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, pp. 24–25.

47 *Submission 9*, p. 3.

an open and public debate on measures that could be taken that would allow both government departments and educational institutions to work better together as partners to promote Australia's interests abroad. It would appear that a more structured and formal arrangement is required to allow people from educational institutions who are promoting Australia abroad to meet and plan activities. The objective of such a group would be to develop an industry engagement strategy and to establish clear 'points of contact' between educational institutions and relevant government agencies. Any such formal grouping should be in direct and regular contact with the IDC and be part of Australia's strategic plan for public diplomacy.

### **Recommendation 12**

**9.52 The committee recommends that DFAT ensure that its public diplomacy framework accommodates the concerns of the educational institutions especially with regard to industry engagement by formulating with DEST and the Vice Chancellors of Australian Universities appropriate strategies to facilitate a more productive engagement by these institutions in Australia's public diplomacy.**

### **Recommendation 13**

**9.53 The committee also recommends that DFAT initiate and sponsor a public debate on measures that could be taken to promote a more productive partnership between government departments and educational institutions in promoting Australia's public diplomacy.**

9.54 In the following chapter, the committee continues its consideration of the coordination of Australia's public diplomacy activities but looks at the activities of associations and individuals not always readily identified with public diplomacy.