

Next phase of the New Colombo Plan 1 November 2024

Key takeaways:

1. Future iterations of the NCP could tie streams more explicitly to the capability and literacy objective.
2. Ongoing learning and engagement opportunities for NCP alumni could contribute to sustained interest in the region.

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission on the future direction of the New Colombo Plan (NCP). Our members have a long history of developing globally-minded graduates and are pleased to offer suggestions based on extensive engagement with the program over the past decade.

Future iterations of the NCP could tie streams more explicitly to the capability and literacy objective

ATN's members support the NCP objective of increasing Australia's Indo-Pacific capability and literacy, including through deeper language learning. We note an inherent tension between developing capability, which requires many students to have a wide range of experiences across Asia, and literacy, which involves deeper and longer-term engagement for a much smaller cohort. Future iterations of the program could delineate these objectives and link them more explicitly to each activity stream (drawing on the Fulbright program in the United States and Erasmus+ in Europe as examples):

- a scholarship stream to develop literacy, and
- a mobility stream, requiring 2-week minimum experiences to develop capability and ongoing interest in engaging with the region.

The scholarship stream would facilitate the deeper engagement required to develop real literacy, while the mobility stream would offer a taste of Asia, spurring interest in undertaking more substantive experiences. If well-organised and structured, short programs have the potential to deliver more than longer engagements for a broader range of students. They are also more readily available across the Indo-Pacific region, increasing the reach of the program and the ability to offer a range of experiences in a range of countries.

The provision of a shorter-term programming option would ensure that students with characteristics that are underrepresented in tertiary education, such as Indigenous students, those with caring responsibilities or those with disabilities, and those who are balancing study and work, are not disadvantaged. These students often have the most to gain from participating in NCP activities, both in terms of their personal development and with the objective of deepening people-to-people links with the region in mind. To further increase uptake, future iterations of the program could offer dedicated funding to overcome barriers to participation, for example assisting Indigenous students to

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travel from remote areas or obtain travel documents, supplementing lost earnings or offsetting carers' costs.

ATN's members would support mechanisms for ongoing consultation with practitioners and stakeholders to refine any changes to the NCP. We would welcome the opportunity to test ideas and ensure that guidelines can be implemented from a practical perspective.

Ongoing learning and engagement opportunities for NCP alumni could contribute to sustained interest in the region

Regular industry- or country-themed alumni networking events could strengthen connections between past participants and create platforms to collaborate and share career opportunities and regional knowledge. These events could incorporate insights from prominent NCP alumni, industry experts, entrepreneurs and influencers to draw in prospective students. We would encourage the inclusion of university staff and Project Leads in these events as well.

The NCP Secretariat could also consider offering alumni exclusive access to regional updates, webinars and language courses to keep them engaged and informed about the Indo-Pacific and reinforce their roles as regional advocates. The creation of a repository of country-specific events and activities that are open to NCP alumni, such as business council functions, cultural events and other opportunities to connect with diaspora communities or industry sectors may assist in maintaining interest and language skills.

ATN Universities thanks the External Advisory Group for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to working closely with the Government and the sector to ensure that the NCP continues to build the strategic capability Australia needs to engage effectively within our region.

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