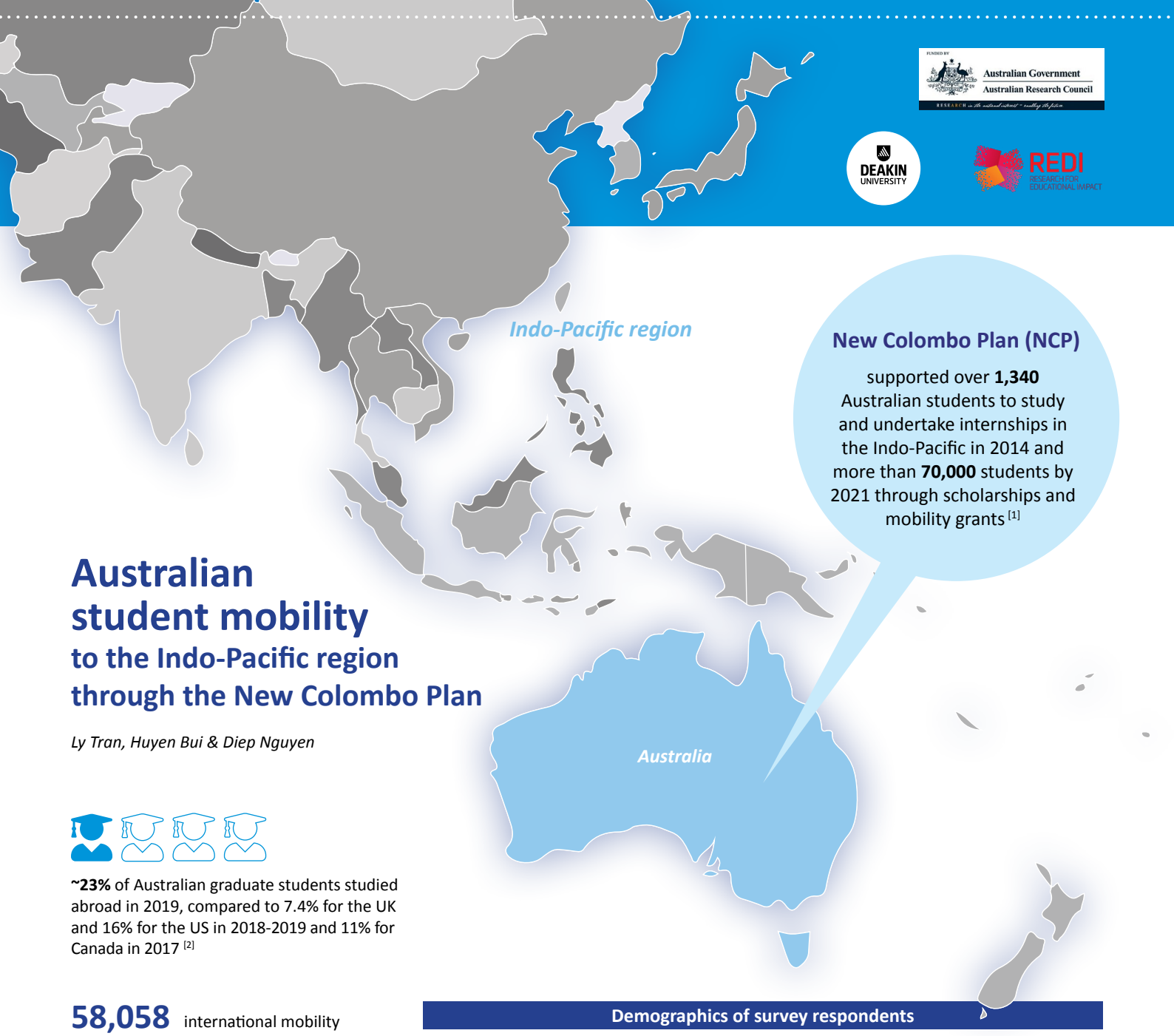

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New Colombo Plan (NCP)

supported over **1,340** Australian students to study and undertake internships in the Indo-Pacific in 2014 and more than **70,000** students by 2021 through scholarships and mobility grants [1]

Australian student mobility

to the Indo-Pacific region through the New Colombo Plan

Ly Tran, Huyen Bui & Diep Nguyen

~23% of Australian graduate students studied abroad in 2019, compared to 7.4% for the UK and 16% for the US in 2018-2019 and 11% for Canada in 2017 [2]

58,058 international mobility experiences in 2019 vs 15,058 in 2009, undertaken by students from **34 Australian universities**, with **49% undertaken by domestic undergraduates** into the Indo-Pacific region [2]

Data sources for this research project:

- Policy documents
- In-country fieldwork
- A national survey of 1,371 NCP students and alumni from 40 universities
- 298 interviews with NCP-related stakeholders*

* including NCP students and alumni, academics, mobility practitioners, hosts, third-party providers and government representatives in Australia and Indo-Pacific host countries.

Demographics of survey respondents

18-25 years old (77%)

33 host countries

90% with previous overseas travel experience

Top fields of study:

- 27% Humanities and Social Sciences
- 16% Accounting, Business, Administration, Economics
- 12% Science
- 11% Law, Legal Studies

Main motivations

- Challenge myself **(96%)**
- Gain experience in the Indo-Pacific **(96%)**
- Get familiar with other culture **(96%)**
- Broaden my understanding of the Indo-Pacific **(96%)**
- Travel to a new place **(95%)**

References: [1] Australian Government (2021a); **[2]** AUIDF (2021); Universities UK International (2020); Institute for International Education (2020); The Study Group on Global Education (2017). **[See the Report for full references]**

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Top areas of Indo-Pacific knowledge development

- Developed an understanding of my host country **(96%)**
- Become more confident about engaging with the Indo-Pacific **(93%)**
- Become interested in connecting with people of Indo-Pacific background in Australia **(87%)**
- Become interested in learning an Asian language **(72%)**

Short-term mobility vs Long-term mobility

Impact

Short-term experiences (4.25/5) ~ **Long-term experiences (4.3/5)**

(with no statistically significant difference)

in the impact of the Indo-Pacific experiences on students' learning outcomes and development

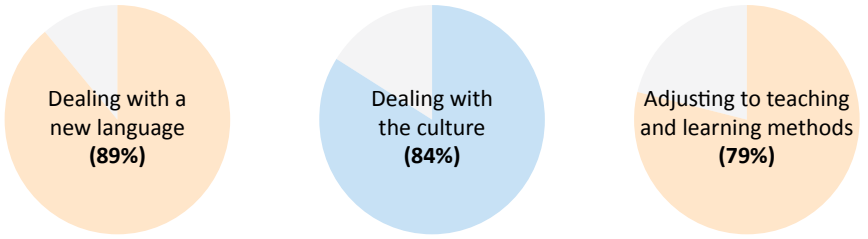
Satisfaction

Short-term mobility students (8.81/10) > **Long-term mobility students (8.49/10)**

(with a statistically significant difference)

in satisfaction with their Indo-Pacific experiences

Top challenges



Impact on employment

Top 8 host countries (75% NCP students in the survey)

Japan, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Republic of Korea, India, Singapore, Malaysia

Top 8 countries NCP alumni are working in or have work related to (74% NCP alumni)

The Indo-Pacific experience is:

- **89%** Useful for my CV
- **44%** Is valued by my current employers
- **44%** Promotes my position

Key findings

Student development and learning: The research provides evidence that the NCP program has achieved its objective of increasing knowledge of the Indo-Pacific among young Australians. The key areas of student learning identified were developing an understanding of and confidence in engagement with the region, while also stimulating connections with Australians of Indo-Pacific background and developing an interest in learning an Asian/Indo-Pacific language.

In particular, **up to 66%** of the students indicated the learning abroad experience made them interested in pursuing employment in the Indo-Pacific.

The top eight host countries (75% of study participants) **mirror the top eight countries NCP alumni in this study are working in or with** (74% NCP alumni) (Japan, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Republic of Korea, India, Singapore, Malaysia).

While 89% participating students agreed that the Indo-Pacific learning abroad experience was useful for their resume, only 44% agreed that it was valued by their current employer.

Impacts on the community: There is evidence that NCP students not only experience personal, intercultural and professional development, but that they use their Indo-Pacific knowledge and experience to influence their family, friends and communities in both home and host countries. However, this impact is more organic and depends on individual students. Well-structured post-study programs could leverage NCP alumni to enhance Indo-Pacific knowledge in the wider community and use them as a catalyst to strengthen relationships between Australia and the region.

Overall impacts: The research provides evidence about the values of learning abroad in the Indo-Pacific via the NCP in terms of building multilateral relationships, establishing and reinforcing research and industry partnerships, strengthening the internationalisation of education and domestic and international recruitment for both home and host universities, and creating social impacts for Australian and Indo-Pacific communities.

Post study

NCP students maintain connections with host communities:

- Local students **(26%)**
- Buddies **(17%)**
- Academics **(14%)**

Social media is the main communication channel:

- Facebook **(31%)**
- Instagram **(20%)**
- WhatsApp **(12%)**

NCP-related activities on return:

- Joining NCP Alumni LinkedIn Group **(27%)**
- Speaking about the experience at an event **(10%)**
- Attending network events with NCP alumni **(10%)**

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Challenges and tensions

Key challenges and tensions listed below are synthesised from the variety of stakeholder views contributing to the project.

Hosts

1 **Host needs and awareness of the NCP:** Hosts lack understanding of the NCP and many are not effectively engaged in designing mobility programs.

Communications

2 **Program information:** Evidence from stakeholders (students, alumni, academics, mobility practitioners, and hosts) shows that the program intent and values have not been adequately communicated and clearly understood.

3 **Student interest:** Some universities and academics are struggling with generating student interest in the program.

4 **Expectations and consultation:** DFAT and university expectations of each other differ, especially university staff perceptions of what they need, and the reality of what DFAT is tasked with.

Academics

5 **Lack of academic engagement:** Many academics are not adequately integrated into the program, are not aware of it, or do not sufficiently understand it.

6 **Lack of systemic guidelines** for academic program leaders in the management of in-country critical incidents, and academics lack expertise in this area.

Program development

7 **Discrepancies** in student selection criteria for mobility programs across universities.

8 **Challenges associated with heavy workloads** for students in intensive short-term mobility.

9 **Challenges with credit recognition and transfer** reported by academics, mobility practitioners and students.

10 **Differences** between academic and mobility staff regarding key performance indicators, project application, program design, and reporting responsibilities but there has been increased understanding and empathy towards each other's responsibilities and workload.

Post-study support and engagement

11 **Post-study experience** is a critical area for development. Student feedback indicates many do not know how to leverage their experience, nor are aware of any resources to act on this. This reflects key stakeholders' uncertainty about who is responsible for this element.

12 **Both host communities and students expressed a strong desire** for post-study connections but reported a struggle with sustaining them.

Evaluation

13 **Hosts and academics are unclear** about whether there are mechanisms for evaluating the program and who is responsible for them.

Workload and funding

14 **Workload:** There is a consensus among academics, mobility practitioners and hosts that one of their biggest challenges is the heightened workload involved in developing and delivering short-term mobility programs.

15 **Funding:** Students have mixed opinions about the amount of funding and are concerned about how to manage their own. Academics and mobility practitioners question the financial return on their time investment, and feel the funding allocation model does not recognise the workload invested in delivering a mobility program. Universities feel that the heavy administrative burden delays funding, and are concerned about funding implications for the program's sustainability and for the partnership between Australian universities and host communities.

Recommendations

Key recommendations below are generated from a variety of stakeholder views from the survey and interviews.

Co-design

1 **Enrich partnership engagement and co-design programs with hosts, including downstream hosts:** It is crucial to understand host needs and engage them across the program cycle (design, pre-departure, delivery and post-study). Hosts should be positioned as equal partners and co-designers rather than as mere recipients of Australian students or program providers. Engaging hosts closely ensures programs are not developed solely through an Australian lens.

Communications and consultation

2 **More extensively and strategically communicate the intent and values of the NCP to hosts (current and prospective), academics and students,** especially underrepresented groups (regional and remote, low SES, first-in-family, Indigenous) and tap into the role of academics in promoting the program to their students.

3 **Strengthen consultation and communications with the sector and enhance clarity of roles** of stakeholders involved in the NCP, including source of leadership, delineation of responsibilities, and who resources specific activities and responds to queries.

Program development and evaluation

4 **Systemic framework to ensure quality and effective evaluation of short-term mobility programs:** Program quality varies significantly across Australian universities. Further resources and investment will ensure consistent quality during and post-study experiences.

5 **Pre-departure and in-country support:** Systemic coordination of a range of pre-departure briefings delivered by multiple stakeholders, and provision of timely and coherent in-country support, especially for critical incidents and wellbeing.

6 **Focus more on the impact of student mobility beyond the in-country experience:** Provide continuing funding for programs that demonstrate impact and engagement in terms of partnership development; leverage the benefits of mobility programs for research, teaching and learning, or service and industry collaborations.

7 **Enhance the post-study experience** by developing a holistic and coherent mechanism, with concrete guidelines and clear communication regarding the stakeholders responsible for supporting students' post-study engagement and experiences. It is critical to create purposeful channels and activities for students to share their Indo-Pacific experiences, engage in ongoing reflection, and sustain collective post-mobility learning with peers and communities at home.

8 **Leverage Indo-Pacific experiences to enhance career progression and employability:** Further support and explicit guidance for alumni to articulate their learning abroad experiences into employability.

9 **Balance and align the values and impacts** of NCP-funded programs on student experience, national human capacity building, diplomatic relations, and regional engagement building.

Best practice

10 **Share good practice** in the design and implementation of mobility programs across the sector, specifically:

- building project applications
- developing effective and impactful mobility programs
- credit transfer and recognition
- developing long-term and formative mobility program evaluation that engages key stakeholders: academics, mobility offices, hosts, third party providers, students and alumni
- fulfilling reporting and acquittal requirements with DFAT and Scope Global as program contract administrator
- leveraging the potential of mobility programs for creating and strengthening research, teaching and learning, and service collaborations with hosts and business partners

11 **Learn from good practices of mobility programs and initiatives regionally and globally** especially through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), which support students across all phases, leverages impact and engagement, builds partnerships among key stakeholders and strengthens alumni engagement.

Engagement

12 **Engage academics more effectively** through communication, incentives, recognition of workload and contributions and dedicated funding to ensure academic rigour in partnerships with hosts, planning and designing of mobility programs, supporting students' in-country experiences, and ongoing learning and engagement for students across the mobility cycle.

13 **Formally invest in capacity building and targeted professional development** for mobility practitioners and academics as part of NCP funding. Current professional development programs for mobility practitioners are narrow and do not reflect their increasingly complex role.

14 **Expand the programs reach** across the various functions of the university (e.g. careers and employment, alumni) so that administration, delivery and engagement with mobility programs is not the sole function of the international office.

15 **Create an environment** where the government, Scope Global (as DFAT contractor), NCP research bodies, institutions' mobility offices, career services, alumni offices, academic program leaders, host communities, third party providers and business champions are able to collaborate seamlessly.