

Australia-India Ministerial Dialogue on Education Cooperation

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

Between the Department of Education and Training of the Government of Australia and the Ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India

**24 August 2015
New Delhi, India**

The Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Minister for Education and Training, Government of Australia, and the Hon Smriti Zubin Irani, Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India, participated in the annual Australia-India Ministerial Dialogue on Education Cooperation in New Delhi, India, on 24 August 2015.

The Ministers reaffirmed the commitment made by Prime Ministers Modi and Abbott in 2014 to strengthen the education, training and research relationship. Both Ministers reflected on the interests and values shared by their respective nations; acknowledged education, training and research as central to the broader strategic partnership; and committed to strengthening and expanding collaboration in the future. The Ministers also acknowledged the critical importance of education and training and a skilled workforce to economic growth.

The Ministers were delighted to reaffirm this commitment through the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the fields of Education, Training and Research. This new understanding renews the historic agreements between Australia and India and refreshes the commitment to the Australia India Strategic Partnership.

The Ministers agreed that support for the recognition of educational qualifications was fundamental to enhance the student and professional mobility and to directly support national productivity, international competitiveness and innovation. To support mutual understanding and resolution of this critical issue, the Ministers agreed to the vigorous pursuit of progress towards mutual understanding and cooperation in this area.

The Ministers emphasized that the Global Initiative for Academic Networks (GIAN), launched by the Government of India, would enable academic interaction to mutual benefit. It

would enable eminent Australian academicians to come to India, to academic institutions and Universities and enable an exchange of knowledge and teaching skills. This would help in developing a fruitful relationship between academic communities on both sides for augmenting research capabilities.

The Ministers co-chaired the **Australia India Education Council (AIEC)** meeting on 24 August and reaffirmed their commitment to the AIEC as the principal body for guiding the strategic direction of the knowledge partnership. The Ministers acknowledged that the AIEC has a fundamental and overarching role in strengthening the Australia-India bilateral education, training and research relationship.

Both Ministers commended the members of the AIEC and the working groups on significant progress across the key areas of skills, higher education and research, student mobility and welfare, quality assurance and qualifications recognition, and welcomed the extension of collaborative activity to include engagement in the schools sector. They noted that the AIEC's distinctive structure, with expert membership from academia, industry and government has provided further impetus to a supportive education policy environment.

The Ministers reaffirmed their continued support for the Council with total joint financial commitments of up to \$ 1.0 million AUD.

Student mobility and welfare

They applauded the initiatives of the AIEC's Student Mobility and Welfare Working Group, including the September 2014 workshop in Mumbai, India, which also launched the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan in India. They commended the development of the credit transfer database, hosted on the Australia India education links website (www.australiaindiaeducation.com), as a practical way to encourage student mobility between Indian and Australian universities.

Minister Pyne also announced a feasibility study to establish an Australia India Consortium for 'In-Country' India Studies, based on the model used by Australian universities in Indonesia.

Higher education and research

The significant enrichment to the knowledge partnership provided by the AIEC's Higher Education and Research Working Group was applauded by both Ministers. The Ministers discussed the Learning and Teaching Collaboration Project, the Australia India Education Leaders' Exchange, the awarding of four AIEC Endeavour Research Fellowships across 2014 and 2015, and the highly successful 2015 Eminent Researcher Lecturer Series as significant contributions to expanding the knowledge partnership.

It was agreed to continue support for enhancing the activities of the Working Group, with a forward work programme of projects to provide proposals for government's consideration on:

- Continuing cooperation on teaching and learning, including development of a teaching resource with contributions from Australian and Indian experts; and a teaching & learning centre of excellence;
- Expanding the pilot of the Eminent Researcher Lecture Programme to include mobility of more eminent researchers in both directions; and
- A pilot project to support mobility of early career researchers, including engagement with counterpart researchers and industry.

It was also agreed to undertake further research to understand the opportunities for sustained collaboration between Australia and India with the aim of increasing the number of research partnerships.

Skills

The Ministers welcomed extension of the already significant activity under the AIEC Skills Working Group, including support for two additional phases of the Australia India Vocational Education Leadership Training programme; and plans for the fourth Australia India Skills Mission and annual skills conference in India in late 2015.

The Ministers also welcomed the high level of collaboration under the AIEC's Skills Working Group, which included highly successful skills missions and conferences in India in both 2013 and 2014; the Australia India Vocational Education Leaders' Training (VELT)

programme; piloting of the International Training and Assessment Courses and collaborative projects to benchmark qualifications across a number of key industry sectors.

They announced the expansion of the VELT programme for two more rounds in 2015-16, which will reach an expanded number of Indian community college leaders.

Quality Assurance and Qualifications Recognition

The Ministers also acknowledged the sectoral cooperation on targeted issues demonstrated by the AIEC's Quality Assurance and Qualifications Recognition Working Group. It was agreed this policy work was paramount to encouraging a highly skilled and mobile workforce.

They announced that a workshop will be held for senior officials in Australia, to address the ongoing bilateral recognition issues between the two countries and to share expertise on quality assurance mechanisms.

Schools

To support schools engagement, Minister Pyne announced a research project to support a forward work programme under the proposed schools working group. This will complement the establishment of the Australia India Building Regional Intercultural Dialogue and Growing Engagement (BRIDGE) school partnerships project, launched by Minister Pyne at Delhi Public School on 24th August. The BRIDGE programme will connect eight Australian and eight Indian schools and focus on building teacher capability across key learning areas, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics, information and communication technologies, intercultural understanding, values and inclusive education.

Institutional collaboration

The Ministers jointly welcomed the signing of a number of memoranda of understanding and communiqués between key Australian and Indian stakeholders throughout the Mission. They also welcomed the commitment from the Group of Eight universities to send a Vice-Chancellor level delegation to India next year, in order to deepen research linkages between the Group of Eight members and Indian counterparts. This commitment is in addition to the

communique signed between the Group of Eight and a number of Indian schools to pursue extended engagement.

Finally, Minister Pyne announced Adam Gilchrist as the inaugural Australia-India Education Ambassador, who will profile the quality of Australian education and strengthen the bilateral education, training and research relationship, including highlighting the Australia's Endeavour Scholarships and Fellowships programme.

The Ministers agreed that the high quality, innovative and sustainable education, skills and research partnerships enriched the Australia India knowledge partnership, supporting mutual efforts towards greater economic and social progress, and increased government, institutional and people-to-people links.

The Ministers looked forward to the next Australia India Ministerial Dialogue on Education Cooperation and Australia India Education Council meetings in Australia in 2016.