

# The Australian Asian Universities Cooperation Scheme

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In Australia and as Vice Chancellor of the ANU, Sir John Crawford devoted time and energy to the creation of the Australian Asian Universities Cooperation Scheme that sought to strengthen teaching and research capacities in agriculture in universities in Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore. He was here an institution builder—both in the sense of enhancing research and teaching capacities in universities in Asia, but also in building a structure and cohesion amongst Australian universities to facilitate a meaningful Australian contribution to that end. Files on the AAUCS are available—including a brief report on the Scheme by WR Stern and KJC Back in 1969—and some information can be found in the *IDP Story* by Lazenby and Blight.

Crawford's involvement appears to have been at both the policy and practice level. He began the discussion in early 1968 when he presented 'proposals for using External Aid Funds to assist Australia universities in a program of aid and cooperation with a university in Indonesia and possibly Malaysia<sup>1</sup>.' The Department of External Affairs, however, laid down some 'basic principles' that stated the primacy of the aid having a direct and lasting effect in improving life in the receiving country and that projects should be based on a request by the receiving country. According to the letter, the Minister wanted to be sure that 'any assistance given from external aid funds does not begin to look like a roundabout way of building up Australian universities themselves'. Whilst these principles may have appeared unexceptional, the informed observer would have recognised that they contained the seeds for bureaucratic intervention in what Crawford hoped would be direct university-to-university links. It also reflected a deeply held scepticism in the aid administration as to the motives of the universities.

In spite of these misgivings, the Department outlined a procedure that 'would possibly meet the necessity of government control of expenditure of aid funds, a requirement (that Crawford would have insisted upon) for a substantially independent role for Australian universities, and a requirement that at the receiving end, the Asian governments involved and Asian universities should accept and exercise the responsibility for determining their own needs'.

The Department's proposals were as follows:

- Departments of Education in Indonesia and Malaysia to be invited by Australian diplomatic posts to name a recipient university or universities.
- The designated recipient university to submit proposals for assistance from Australian universities within broadly stated financial limits covering say a three year period.
- Proposals from recipient countries to be examined by a subcommittee of the Vice-Chancellors' Committee and referred to the government, with specific recommendations as to the role of each participating Australian university in the implementation of the requests, including an estimate of the costs to be met from Australia aid funds.
- The recommendations of the Vice-Chancellors' sub-committee to be examined by an interdepartmental body consisting of External Affairs, Education and Science, and Treasury in March each year, for inclusion in aid estimates for the forthcoming financial year.

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<sup>1</sup> See letter of 4 April 1968 from KCO Shann, First Assistant Secretary Department of External Affairs to Crawford.

- The approved program of assistance would involve:
  - (i) a number of fellowships for staff training in Australia for up to two years duration;
  - (ii) a number of travelling awards for Australian professors and senior lecturers to spend six to twelve months in the recipient university;
  - (iii) finance for the supply of library text books or reference books; and
  - (iv) funds for the supply of laboratory equipment.
- In order to preserve the interuniversity complexion of the proposal, it would probably be necessary for the Australian committee to convey the approved program directly to the recipient universities. In order to preserve the government's role and to maintain coordination with official aid programmes, the approved programme would also be brought to the attention of the country concerned through the normal diplomatic channels.
- The administration of the approved program, including processing of fellowships, arrangements for visiting professors and supply of books and laboratory equipment to be handled through established machinery if the Aid Branch.

Shann suggested funding in the order of \$250,000 per annum as an initial figure for a program of this size.

Crawford might have balked at the cumbersome procedures involved but he appears to have gone along with them. [I have not been able to find a Crawford reply to Shann's letter.]

Two 'worries' raised by Shann would have attracted Crawford's attention and possibly his ire: whether a central body can speak effectively for all Australian universities; and whether External Affairs and the AVCC could be sure of agreed procedure being followed without 'enthusiastic individuals embarking upon independent exercises which might carry unwelcome commitments as far as the use of aid funds were concerned'. Shann also worried whether Asian universities could in fact produce a realistic forecast of their needs for three years into the future. (Of course, he noted, some could but these may not be the institutions most needing help. Perhaps joint planning with their Australian counterparts is the first step in a program of cooperation.)

Shann was also concerned as to whether it would be possible to ensure that the best fellows brought to Australia for training were not enticed to remain for higher studies. He also suggested that it might be possible to devise suitable instructions in teaching materials for Asian university staff in selected faculties.

Crawford involved himself closely in the Scheme as seemed necessary, and took whatever steps<sup>2</sup> were needed to overcome roadblocks. At the practice level, for example, he asked and the Indonesian counterpart agreed, that once initial approval of a proposed program had been agreed by the Indonesian consortium of universities, there would be no objection to direct correspondence between the relevant universities in Australia and Indonesia. Sir John was, no doubt, keen to avoid bureaucratic delays or intervention in the program concerned. [See letter from RP Throssel, International Training Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs, to Koesnadi Hardjesomantri, Indonesia Department of Education and Culture. See also Crawford's letter to Hutasoit of 21 June 1971.]

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<sup>2</sup> Personal Communication, Alec Lazenby, October 2015. According to Lazenby, Crawford also 'knew what he wanted to do, picked people to give practical advice, and kept universities on side with the Scheme'.

Crawford's stern message to Jockel, Australian Ambassador to Indonesia, dated 19 Feb 1971 reflects his impatience with university bureaucracy:

APPARENT INABILITY OF AGRICULTURAL FACULTIES CONSORTIUM (IKIP) TO GIVE DECISIONS ON ITEMS OF CURRENT AAUCS PROGRAM COMMUNICATED IN OCTOBER AND DISCUSSED WITH FORSTER DURING HIS VISIT IS JEOPARDISING FUTURE OF PROGRAM IN INDONESIA.

WE ARE AWAITING IKIP (A) CV FOR EACH OF THE FELLOWSHIPS OFFERED FOR REFRESHER AND POSTGRADUATE STUDY IN AUSTRALIA IN THIS ACADEMIC YEAR AND (B) RECOMMENDATIONS AS TO PRIORITIES OF ADDITIONAL LABORATORY EQUIPMENT AND TEXT BOOKS FOR UNIVERSITIES OF BRAWIJAYA, HASANUDDIN, AND UDAYANA.

TOTAL AAUCS BUDGET FOR THESE ITEMS IS ALMOST DOLLARS 43,000.

UNLESS WE RECEIVE DECISIONS FROM IKIP BY FIRST MARCH WE MUST RESERVE RIGHT TO CORRESPOND WITH THE APROPRIATE UNIVERSITIES DIRECT AND TO CONSIDER CANCELLATION OF THESE PARTS OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM IF WE CANNOT OBTAIN EARLY DECISIONS FROM THE UNIVERSITIES.

MOST GRATEFUL FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN THIS MATTER,

REGARDS

CRAWFORD

Crawford received a placating reply from Jockel explaining the 'practical difficulties with new programs in Indonesia', noting problems arose from KIP's leadership changes but that the greatest problem at present lies with the Directorate of Higher Education.

In 1971-72 it was agreed that the program should comprise funds for 'more sophisticated equipment for the universities of Brawijaya, Hasanuddin and Udayana; subscriptions to journals, text books for university libraries, and a set of 'visits to Australia for short courses, surveys (by Australian academics and senior laboratory technicians), fellowships to Australian universities, and short courses to be conducted at Indonesian universities, in such fields as horticulture and animal production'.

In reflections on proposed inclusion of West Irian within the scope of AAUCS, the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia GA Jockel observed the "absence of Javanese" not only from West Irian but also from Nusa Tenggara and that racial groups in these islands whilst different from each other had more in common with each other than any of them have with the Javanese or Balinese. [Confidential letter 29 October 1970.

Other issues to be covered in the biography for this period: the English language problem where out of "300 men who were otherwise ready for postgraduate training only 10 would be able to pass the English Language Test"; the scope of the AAUC S program widened to include food technology, forestry and population studies; see memo from Doug Anthony to William McMahon on urgent need to include aid in animal health to Indonesia that provide a serious threat of infection for Australian livestock industries, anticipating the 'doing well by doing good' theme adopted by the Crawford Fund.

The Scheme was steadily expanded to include Malaysia (through the Universitas Pertanian Malaysia), Thailand (Prince of Songhkla University), and Singapore (Nanyang Technical University and the National University of Singapore). The assistance in Indonesia was discipline-based in the plant and animal sciences, technical support

services, agricultural economics and basic sciences, whereas elsewhere it was centred on a whole of faculty approach. In Malaysia, a consultant would work with the Dean of a Faculty to plan course structures and analyse staffing needs.

In 1969 Stern and Back reported, 'a Scheme with as many ramifications as this one, problems and difficulties do arise. There are problems in relations with governments, with bureaucracies in Asian universities, and on occasion simply with the logistics of conducting an exercise. These are overcome by the good will of the cooperating parties'.

The most comprehensive statement on the purpose of the Scheme is contained in a review of it undertaken at Sir John's behest (in view of his 'impending retirement') in 1971 and conveyed in a memorandum signed by him.

The review report is a typical Crawford masterpiece: it makes modest but positive claims of achievement, defends the Scheme's administrative costs, and expresses cautious and understated ambition for 'steady' growth<sup>3</sup>. It restates the principles underlying the Scheme ranging from securing the general support of governments of receiving countries; the focus on food production and population with scope for embracing food technology, forestry, agricultural economics and English; cooperation with other organisations with research and educational functions; the role of an AVCC Standing Committee in handling the Scheme; and the appointment of an Executive Officer to the secretariat in Canberra.

According to the review, 'by and large the Scheme...developed in accordance with the preceding terms and conditions'; the committee structure established by the AVCC 'worked well'; and 'the patient development of inter-communication at both academic and administrative levels is now paying its first dividends', especially as 'little was known in [the target countries] about Australia and her universities'<sup>4</sup>.

According to the review, expenditure brought to account in the period 1969 to 1971 was 'largely for equipment and materials [but that] the 1971-72 program has turned decisively towards academic cooperation and a recent review of progress has indicated that it will largely be achieved.' Whilst the task of strengthening universities in Indonesia and elsewhere is described as formidable, it claimed that the 'policy of steady expansion within a framework of objectives determined by experience and known resources has proved to be flexible and satisfactory'.

Crawford repeats the point in a discussion under future development in the review: one of the most encouraging features of the Scheme's short history has been the considerable interest displayed in it by the Australian universities<sup>5</sup> and their willingness to participate in the program on fairly exacting terms. The Scheme, unlike the Colombo Plan, did not automatically pick up salary and related costs of university staff engaged on projects. Crawford felt that despite this condition, which enabled the Scheme to obtain academic services at minimal cost, there had been very little difficulty in securing staff, and that there was sufficient evidence accumulated to indicate that with more funds to support a wider range of activities, the response from universities would be even greater.

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<sup>3</sup> Crawford used the phrase 'steady growth' often in his projections for organisations with which he was associated.

<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that the AAUCS, along with the Colombo Plan, was pivotal in building the knowledge base of Australia and Australian universities which in turn contributed to the success of Australia's international education program. Certainly, IDP Education Australia, the successor organisation to the AAUCS, played a crucial role in that program.

<sup>5</sup> By 1969 some 13 universities, 4 colleges of advanced education and 4 government departments or agencies (including CSIRO) were engaged in the Scheme. Several private individuals, foundations, groups and organisations were associated with the Scheme in some way.

Crawford endorses the idea of extending the Scheme to Thailand, but after noting needs in the South Pacific, Papua New Guinea and India, does not pursue the case for expansion<sup>6</sup> of the Scheme to these regions except perhaps in an advisory capacity. He recommends inclusion of 'social and economic aspects of agricultural change and of the planning requirements for small to medium-scale industry and infrastructure especially in rural areas'.

Crawford addresses the administration of the Scheme and specifically the need to strengthen its Secretariat. In this context he deals with claims of what some saw as the costs attendant, noting that the actual costs had been considerably understated and by no means met by funding allocated to the Scheme from the aid program. He dispatches statements made 'at meetings with the governmental interdepartmental committee that costs of academic and secretarial administration (\$20,000) at 10% of the total budget are high' by noting that 'neither the indictment nor use of so primitive a yardstick is justified'. He also displays his ambitions for the Scheme by noting that if annual expenditure were to approach \$500,000, a full time assistant to the Executive Officer might be needed at graduate level.

Crawford's recommendations were largely accepted by the AVCC and the Department of External Affairs. *The file includes exchanges of correspondence between Crawford and the Department. Crawford's successors at the AAUCS include Professor Alec Lazenby who should be consulted further on this part of the biography.*

AAUCS evolved into the Australian Universities International Development Program (AUIDP) and then with the accession of the Colleges of Advanced Education to the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges with the simplified acronym IDP. With the advent of the full fee overseas student program in 1984/86, counselling and recruitment of international students to Australian universities and colleges became a major feature of IDP which changes its longer title to IDP Education Australia Limited, a multimillion dollar not for profit enterprise. Eventually, IDP was privatised and is now known as IDP Education Inc. Its core activities are international student recruitment, international English language teaching, and the highly profitable International English Language Testing System. Some of its short course training activities are now pursued by the Crawford Fund. An account of the history of IDP from 1969 to 1999 can be found in 'The Story of IDP' by Alec Lazenby and Blight. In 2019, IDP shall celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

DG Blight AO FRSA, Chief Executive, the Crawford Fund

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<sup>6</sup> This tactic of describing potential areas of expansion but then conservatively not pursuing them is another familiar Crawford approach.