

Examining the impact of Australia Awards around the world



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ACER is evaluating the long-term contributions of Australia Awards alumni through the Global Tracer Facility funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). **Dan Edwards** reports

Since the 1950s, more than 80 000 Australia Awards and predecessor Australian Government scholarships and fellowships have been conferred to emerging leaders from developing countries. The Australia Awards Global Tracer Facility, funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and run by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), is investigating the development contributions of Australia Awards alumni and the long-term impact of the scholarships and fellowships.

In the inaugural year, ACER researchers working in the facility contacted more than 1500 alumni from 27 countries who had completed their scholarships between 2006 and 2010 to participate in a Tracer survey. The online survey provided insights into the alumni's use of expertise and knowledge and their involvement in networking in their home countries. Some of the findings are highlighted below:

- 98 per cent have transferred their skills and knowledge to others in their home countries.
- 97 per cent have pioneered improved practices and innovations in their work.
- 40 per cent have remained in touch with fellow scholarship alumni.
- 26 per cent have contact with Australian alumni.
- 55 per cent have a professional link with Australia.

In its second year the survey focused on alumni who studied in Australia between 1996 and 2005, while research in Year 3 focuses on alumni who studied in Australia between 2006 and 2011.

In addition to the online survey, ACER researchers conduct telephone interviews with more than 500 alumni each year, and also dig even deeper into the results through case studies in-country that illustrate the outcomes of the Australia Awards.

For these case studies, the researchers visit the home countries of the alumni, interviewing them, their colleagues and other stakeholders to collect data and understand their experience. These in-depth research pieces focus on a specific sector or field of expertise. Examples from the case studies undertaken are outlined below.

Indonesia

The Indonesian alumni of Australia Awards who studied education in Australia between 2006 and 2010 are helping to rebuild the education system in the tsunami-affected regions of their home country. The 2004 tsunami wreaked havoc in Indonesia, destroying schools in disadvantaged regions and killing more than 1500 teachers.

After completing their studies in Australia and returning to Indonesia, two of the alumni interviewed from Aceh, Ms Eridafitri Muchtar and Dr Fadliadi Ubit, supported the professional development of teachers in the tsunami-affected disadvantaged regions.

Flinders University alumna Ms Muchtar became a teacher-trainer training English language teachers in Aceh and the surrounding region. Under the Australia Awards English Language Teaching Assistance program (ELTA), she was involved in the professional development of teachers in remote areas including Maluku, Papua, Papua Barat, East Nusa Tenggara and West Nusa Tenggara. Another Flinders University alumnus, Dr Fadliadi, helped teachers undertake professional development for improving their teaching and pedagogical skills.

The interviewed alumni said that they have contributed to teacher training, curriculum reform, and improving pedagogy in the Indonesian education sector.

Solomon Islands

The interviews of Solomon Islands alumni studying health degrees in the period from the mid-to late-2000s revealed that upon return they are contributing to the health services of their home countries. With a range of valuable expertise gathered in infectious diseases and epidemiology, dental care, health education and health policy, they are making notable contributions in bringing a positive change in maternal and child health and to the professional development of health workers.

Australia Awards alumni reported contributing to leadership within the health sector, knowledge sharing in the workplace and beyond, national health policies and practices, and the health



outcomes of the community, thus addressing the challenges of universal health care in the region.

China

Fellowship alumni in China who completed their education in Australia between 2007 and 2010 are using their Australian skills and knowledge to improve health and water management practices. After receiving specialised training from prestigious Australian institutions in water resource management, climate change and public health, alumni testified that they were taught to think differently.

Alumnus Dr Hou Xiaohui, who studied at Griffith University, contributed to the Shanghai Declaration on promoting health in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, on behalf of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2016. Alumna Ms Fan Jie described her course at the International Water Centre (IWC) as far more advanced than courses offered in water management and hydrology in China. She was particularly impressed by the way her course changed her mindset about promoting water conservation through public campaigns.

In addition, other outcomes of the fellowships include research collaborations, working partnerships between many of the individuals and institutions involved, and MoUs between Chinese and Australian organisations.

Mongolia

The findings of the research in Mongolia reveal that Australia Awards alumni

are making notable contributions to professionalism, international credibility, and sustained growth of the financial sector. They are engaged in enhancing financial practices and supporting the capacity strengthening of their colleagues. In addition, they are involved in building core national development strategies, such as the 'Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030'.

Alumni acquired a range of skills in project management, financial monitoring and auditing, intercultural competencies, networking, corporate governance, and policy development that they are now applying to the Mongolia financial sector. The study cites that Australian expertise is highly coveted in Mongolia and Australia Awards are the 'best' scholarship program available to emerging leaders.

Inclusiveness is one of the important goals of the Australia Awards. The awards have been successful in promoting gender equality by establishing policies in Mongolia but have only partially achieved the inclusion of people with disability due to systemic barriers.

Vanuatu

Evidence from Vanuatu suggests that alumni are making contributions to the legal and judicial sectors with their Australian-made skills. Some of the positive changes they have brought to the systems include improvements in customs and policing governance, introduction of specialised legal knowledge and practice in the

workforce, and upskilling in the legal, police and customs workforces.

Many alumni have contributed to the development of national goals in Vanuatu. The study also noted that the alumni had 'mutually beneficial' professional ties with Australia, as well as 'strong, positive views' about their host country.

The research-based project designed to evaluate the contributions of Australia Awards alumni will continue until 2020. The project will provide robust insights into the alumni's use of skills and knowledge developed overseas during their fellowship period in Australia. ■

LINKS

<https://rd.acer.org/article/australia-awards-alumni-lead-change-in-chinese-health-and-environment-polic>

<https://rd.acer.org/article/australia-awards-alumni-help-rebuild-education-sector-in-post-tsunami-indon>

<https://rd.acer.org/article/australia-awards-alumni-improve-health-outcomes-in-solomon-islands-report-f>

<https://rd.acer.org/article/strengthening-law-and-justice-in-vanuatu>

<https://rd.acer.org/article/more-than-1500-alumni-participate-in-tracer-facility-fieldwork>

<https://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/australia-awards/Pages/australia-awards-global-tracer-facility.aspx>