

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee Department of the Senate
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(by email)

Dear Secretary

I am writing to you as the Chief Executive of the Russell Group of universities. The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities, with members including the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, King's College London and Imperial College London. Russell Group universities produce 68% of the UK's world-leading research (worth £34bn a year) and generate almost £87bn a year for the UK economy.

The Russell Group has a long standing and deep relationship with the Group of Eight (Go8), and together our members have engaged in many high-quality collaborations, to the mutual benefit of both countries. Examples include:

- A collaboration between the University of Queensland's (UQ) School of Biomedical Sciences and the University of Oxford to enable UQ Honours students to undertake research at Oxford under a scholarship, and Oxford masters students to complete research projects at the University of Queensland;¹
- A 2019 initiative via which 24 undergraduate students from the University of Sydney travelled to the University of Cambridge's Møller Institute, to study innovation and entrepreneurship;²
- A joint PhD initiative between Monash University and the University of Warwick, which allows candidates to study at two innovative and internationally renowned institutions.³

Initiatives such as these provide many benefits. Student programs ensure that participants receive robust training from highly ranked global institutions in two countries; promote resilience and flexibility; and help students to achieve independence and cultural competency across different successful multicultural environments. Collaborative research projects allow the top minds from Australia to work with those in North America, UK and Europe to develop world leading solutions to global problems. And both build the lifelong relationships that will further cement ties between our countries in the decades to come — decades in which this may become increasingly important.

¹ <https://global-engagement.uq.edu.au/europe/united-kingdom#:~:text=A%20collaboration%20between%20UQ's%20School,the%20UK%20and%20a%20bursary.>

² <https://www.sydney.edu.au/study/why-choose-sydney/student-life/student-news/2019/03/22/students-collaborate-on-industry-projects-at-cambridge-university.html>

³ <https://www.monash.edu/international/monash-warwick/study-with-us/jdp>

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University of Birmingham
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
Cardiff University
Durham University
University of Edinburgh
University of Exeter
University of Glasgow
Imperial College London
King's College London
University of Leeds
University of Liverpool
London School of Economics
and Political Science
University of Manchester
Newcastle University
University of Nottingham
University of Oxford
Queen Mary University of London
Queen's University Belfast
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University College London
University of Warwick
University of York

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I am therefore very concerned at the impact that the Australian Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Bill 2020 could have on the capacity of our members to continue to engage with Australian universities. As I understand it, the provisions in this Bill will:

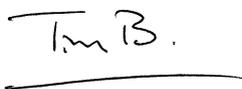
- Allow the Australian Foreign Minister to review – and potentially terminate – any existing or prospective “arrangement” involving an Australian and foreign university, either at the commencement of the agreement or at any indeterminate time in the future; and
- An “arrangement” is defined so broadly it essentially covers any communication that is in writing and refers to any possible agreement or initiative, whether or not it is legally binding.

I understand that the text of the Bill intends only to capture foreign universities that do not have “institutional autonomy”. However, the term “institutional autonomy” appears to not yet be defined. Without a clear understanding of how this term will be interpreted and applied in practice I cannot be certain whether or not our members would be included under this provision even though the autonomy of universities in the UK is protected under our Higher Education and Research Act (2017).

In summary, this Bill introduces significant uncertainty, unpredictability and indeed risk, into any engagement Russell Group members might undertake with an Australian university partner. This is particularly unfortunate at a time when the UK is actively looking to develop a free trade deal with Australia in which we hope it will be possible to strengthen collaborative ties in research and education between our two nations.

The Russell Group and Go8 have enjoyed a strong, effective and longstanding relationship that has been of great benefit to both countries. It would be deeply regrettable if this were to be limited due to the Foreign Relations Bill.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim B." followed by a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Tim Bradshaw
Chief Executive, Russell Group