



# More cash needed for overseas study

Rachel Lebihan

**U**niversities have called on Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans to put his money where his mouth is and boost funding for international study experiences for domestic students.

Senator Evans told a Universities Australia conference that more students should study in Asia. But federal government funding for scholarship programs for outbound student mobility remained stable at \$6.3 million in 2009 and 2010, according to an Australian Universities International Directors Forum benchmarking study.

The funding was not expected to have risen, according to the Australian Institute for Mobility Overseas (AIM Overseas). It expects university contributions to rise to about \$25 million in 2012 from \$20.1 million in 2010.

The amount advanced to students through an income-contingent loan scheme, OS-HELP, rose to \$33.8 million (subject to reconciliation against actual data) and is estimated to grow to \$39 million this year, federal government data shows.

University of NSW's pro vice-chancellor (international), Jennie Lang, said lack of funding was prohibiting the ability to scale up study abroad schemes. UNSW set targets five years ago to double the number of students with an overseas experience from 500 a year to 1000 by 2012. It has hit the target.

"We're putting what we can in, but we've got to try to look at other ways in which we can augment what we're doing to increase participation," Ms Lang said.

"Realistically we can't think big unless we have mechanisms to support what we're doing as part of an Australian government internationalisation strategy for education."

Five per cent of UNSW students now participate in study abroad programs.

Ms Lang said it would be good to increase that to at least 10 per cent in the short term. But scalability was the biggest problem.

"Looking at large-scale outbound exchanges needs a different resource

base," she said. "We're looking at [university] networks and consortia to provide us with added capacity . . . to grow our outbound exchange placements."

One network that UNSW has joined is the Global Education Engineering Exchange program – a consortium of 45 global engineering schools. UNSW engineering students will visit those institutions from this year. The Faculty of Law is fundraising so that law students have a global education built into their program.

Universities received \$443,000 from private funds or foundations in Australia in 2010 for outbound student mobility. That is expected to remain about the same this year, according to AIM Overseas.

Murdoch University professor David Hill, who recently launched the government-funded report *Indonesian in Australian universities: Strategies for a strong future*, said additional government funding was required.

"Every Australian student who spends a semester or a year studying at a university in

**There is strong, recent research that outbound experiences help aid student retention.**

Rob Malicki, AIM Overseas

Indonesia, for example, returns to Australia with a really grounded knowledge of what makes Indonesia tick. That is a tremendous asset to business, to government, to community relations and that is a

return on the investment of time that the student puts in," he said.

"It's very reasonable to expect the government, and to a degree private industry, to participate in that process of investment."

The Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Studies had been operating for 15 years "but our capacity to do that and get students to Indonesia is limited by the

resources we have", Mr Hill said.

"At the moment we can get dozens of students into Indonesia, but we need in Indonesia hundreds if not thousands and to make that transition from what is a quality program to what is a volume program we require government to support and to underpin those arrangements."

At La Trobe University, 14 per cent of completing undergraduates in 2011 had an overseas study experience. The university would like to increase that to 20 per cent over the next few years.

La Trobe's executive director international, Liz Stinson, said while the number of students with an outbound study experience was increasing each year, the university's budget was not growing at this point.

She said growing the proportion of graduates with an overseas study experience would also be more difficult as student numbers grow in line with government targets that 40 per cent of 24-to-35-year-olds have an undergraduate degree by 2025. At Swinburne University, plans for 20 per cent of completing students to have overseas study experience by 2015 may have to be extended. The university expects to hit 15 per cent in 2012.

The university's vice-president, international and development, Jeffrey Smart, said increasing the proportion of students with an overseas study experience was a challenge as the overall size of the university expanded.

Mr Smart said while funding was important, "I think what our experience at Swinburne demonstrates is you don't have to have a huge student mobility fund in order to encourage student mobility."

AIM Overseas co-director Rob Malicki said 12 per cent of Australian completing students in 2010 had participated in an overseas study trip, compared with 13.5 per cent in the United States, which had a 40-year head start.

"Australia is not just a one-way international education provider, despite our reputation as such," Mr Malicki said. "There is strong,





recent research that outbound experiences help aid student retention and that students who have had overseas study experiences do academically better than those who haven't. This is perhaps one reason institutions are committing additional resources to getting more Australians abroad.”

He said access to funding to go abroad was always a barrier.

But the government's decision to scrap fees on OS-HELP loans has helped address the issue.



**Chris Evans says more students should study overseas but no additional funding has been given.**

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