



Queensland University of Technology

2 George Street GPO Box 2434
Brisbane Qld 4001 Australia
Phone +61 7 3138 8086 Fax +61 7 3138 4061
Email vc@qut.edu.au www.qut.edu.au

**Professor Margaret Sheil AO
Vice-Chancellor and President**

5 June 2019

Mr Kevin Magee
Assistant Secretary, China Economic and Engagement Branch
North Asia Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Australian Government

Email: nfacr@dfat.gov.au

Dear Mr Magee

QUT submission on the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written submission regarding the establishment of the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations; a high profile platform with a broader capacity to promote Australia-China ties.

I attach the QUT submission, made in response to the consultation paper and questions included in your email of Friday 17 May 2019.

Should you require any further information or clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact my Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (International), Professor Scott Sheppard, at scott.sheppard@qut.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Sheil', followed by a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Professor Margaret Sheil AO
Vice-Chancellor and President



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National Foundation for Australia-China relations

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Practical cooperation with China could be enhanced and supported by more sustained multi-level contacts with the Chinese key entities. This would include more connections with officials at both central- and provincial-level, and additional study tours both ways.

Of course a key platform that would fundamentally support the goals of the Foundation is the building of China skills in Australia. The lack of investment in Chinese language and general skills in dealing with China is a major impediment for the relationship. It is a strategic disaster that the number of Asian literate graduates is now lower than in the 1980s. An urgent investment in China literacy is required. This could also take the form of short courses for current leaders, building knowledge of China.

Expanding the work of current Australian resources, such as the Lowy Institute and Asialink, pushing objective research and skills and capacity building in Asian literacy (particularly Chinese literacy) would also be a positive development. Critical, we believe, is that these skills are developed and invested in *within* Australia. It has been too easy for successive governments and corporate Australia to “buy in” expertise, in language or other areas, rather than building the capacity in Australia. It is worth noting that this is the model that China has itself used with remarkable success: to build capacity in its own people in English language skills and literacy in dealing with Western institutions.

Australia cannot rely on native speakers of Chinese for our engagement with China, and must invest and build our own skill-base.

Leadership exchange could be enhanced by deepening connections with key specific domain focus. That is, in addition to general literacy and knowledge development, we also build genuine connections with, for example, the Ministry of Science and Technology both at a senior leaders-level but also at a working- and development-level. Specific focus would allow real depth and engagement to be developed. The foundation may consider organising a China-Australia Higher Education President Forum in Australia to showcase the collaboration between Chinese and Australian universities.

It is also true that some of the shadowing programs developed between Australia and China have been productive, a particular positive result was the shadowing program between university leaders. Such programs could be adjusted to take account of more current learning technologies but the opportunity for face to face connections between leaders is still very worthwhile in building genuine connections.

An annual dialogue between sectors could be enhanced with more investment in building detailed knowledge of shared issues and programs to solve them.

Additional investment in the Australia China Special Fund would also reap practical and positive outcomes.

Showcase of Australian 'best practice' in key areas through virtual programs, calibrated for the Chinese audiences and selective applied.

Engagement with the Chinese-Australian community should be one of the easiest early wins for the Foundation. The community is active and interested in connecting with both sides and is keen to work as a bridge.

However, community politics can be a distraction in this space therefore an open and transparent platform that focuses on deepening the knowledge of China in the wider Australian community utilising the interest of the Chinese diaspora can be implemented. Unpacking some of the myths about the current Chinese system through active participation and knowledge sharing while at the same time ensuring that Australia's core values are front and centre.

There is growing perception among Chinese students that it is difficult to obtain work experience in Australia despite the post study work scheme. The Foundation could provide incentive to companies in Australia to offer work experience or internship opportunities to Chinese students studying in Australia or on a post study work visa.

Obviously the education sector is a key and ready-to-use platform for engagement with the Foundation. Utilising the existing extensive links into the Chinese system, at all levels, and having a grass roots program of engagement would deliver a fundamental difference for Australia.

What the Foundation should avoid is replicating existing programs, whether at a state- or local-level. By coordinating a high level of engagement the Foundation would have genuine impact. A major schools engagement program working with current programs would deliver a long term benefit in building practical cooperation with China.

It is very timely to consider and evaluate previous programs that may focussed too much on areas such as sport and not enough on wider spread acquisition of knowledge of China. Similarly an enormous opportunity exists for scientific and education exchanges.