

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL TUESDAY 2 JUNE 2020

Historic Indonesian studies program under threat due to COVID-19 pandemic

PERTH – Tuesday, 2 June 2020. The future of the Australian Consortium for ‘In-Country’ Indonesian Studies (ACICIS) is under threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated international travel bans. Following an evacuation of Australian students on ACICIS programs from Indonesia in March, the organisation has been buffeted by a series of further COVID-19 related program cancellations which has wiped out much of its revenue for 2020. Should travel to Indonesia remain off-limits to Australian university students into 2021, accumulated revenue losses are likely to force the 25-year-old university joint venture out of business by October.

ACICIS has been key to the successful roll-out in Indonesia of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) New Colombo Plan (NCP) initiative. Brainchild of former Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, the NCP has encouraged tens of thousands of Australian university students to pursue study abroad in the countries of the Indo-Pacific over the past six years - including in Indonesia. Since the launch of this DFAT initiative in 2014, ACICIS has secured over \$12 million in NCP funding to support more than 2,500 students from consortium’s 23 Australian member universities to study in Indonesia.

Prior to 2014, Indonesia hosted only a few hundred Australian university students each year. Thanks to the ready availability of NCP funding and the shared in-country infrastructure that ACICIS provides to Australian universities, Indonesia’s popularity as a study abroad destination among Australian students has risen steadily. According to recent figures published by the Australian Universities International Directors’ Forum (AUIDF), in 2018, nearly two thousand Australian students studied abroad in Indonesia, making it the 7th most popular destination for Australians studying abroad. This places Indonesia behind major student destinations like China, the US, and the UK, but now ahead of other traditionally popular study abroad destinations for Australian students like Canada and Germany.

“The sudden halt to ACICIS activities caused by the pandemic is particularly painful given the unprecedented numbers of Australian students we’ve seen studying in Indonesia in recent years,” said ACICIS Director, Liam Prince. “If you had told me back in 2013 that we would have 500 students on ACICIS programs each year and nearly 2,000 Australian students studying in Indonesia annually, I would have said you were dreaming,” continued Mr Prince. “We’ve made such progress in creating a genuine two-way exchange of students between Australia and Indonesia. It will be heartbreaking to have the pandemic stall this momentum and reverse these gains” Mr Prince added.

With its income - and capacity to pay staff in both Australia and Indonesia - tied to the ability of Australian students to travel, the race is on to find a way of keeping ACICIS’ doors open. “We’re in discussions with our colleagues in DFAT, the Commonwealth Department of Education, and of course, the consortium’s member universities,” said Mr Prince, “to try and secure a financial lifeline that ensures ACICIS is around once travel restrictions are lifted.” “We are also exploring how we might deliver Indonesia-focused experiences to Australian students virtually or online while travel is not permitted,” explained Mr Prince. He acknowledged, however, that student demand for such “virtual” international experiences was largely uncharted territory for the organisation.

ACICIS Study Indonesia

Media release



In addition to these measures, the consortium has launched a public fundraising campaign. The campaign aims to appeal for financial assistance from ACICIS' large network of alumni - many of who now hold significant positions in Australian government, academia, media, and private enterprise, and who continue to contribute to Australia-Indonesia relations in diverse ways. "It's our hope," said Mr Prince, "that those of our alumni for whom study in Indonesia was a formative experience might have a desire to 'pay this forward' and contribute to ensuring ACICIS is around after the pandemic to deliver similar formative experiences to the next generation of Indonesia-curious Australian students." The appeal aims to raise \$150,000 to assist in preserving the organisation's core infrastructure in Australia and Indonesia until normal operations can resume. The ACICIS fundraising campaign will run throughout June. If you'd like to give, please visit: <https://www.acicis.edu.au/acicis-fundraising-appeal/>

The Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies known as ACICIS (pronounced "Ah-Chee-Chis" as an Indonesian would) is a national, not-for-profit educational consortium that develops and facilitates study and internship programs for Australian university students in Indonesia. Since its establishment in 1995, more than 3,500 students have undertaken study in Indonesia through the consortium's programs – including 517 students last year (2019) alone. ACICIS is one of the key achievements of Indonesian studies in Australia in the last 30 years and an example of sustained interuniversity cooperation with few parallels. The Australian Government's [Australia in the Asian Century White Paper](#) (2012) cited ACICIS as a 'successful model for in-country learning'. In 2017, the Commonwealth Department of Training commissioned [a feasibility study](#) which cited ACICIS as the exemplar for a similar organisation aimed at increasing Australian student mobility to India. Earlier this year (2020), ACICIS was recognised by DFAT [as a highlight of the first 70 years of bilateral relations](#) between Australian and Indonesia.

For more information, please visit: www.acicis.edu.au

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The Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies known as ACICIS (pronounced "ah-chee-chis" as an Indonesian would) has been opening doors to tertiary institutions throughout Indonesia since 1994, offering a range of study options and in-country support to help students gain invaluable first-hand experience of one of the richest and most diverse countries in the world.