



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

# Foreign Arrangements Scheme

## Annual Report 2024



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# Foreign Arrangements Scheme

## Annual Report 2024

# About the Foreign Arrangements Scheme

**The Foreign Arrangements Scheme ensures Australian governments, at all levels, speak with one voice on Australia’s foreign policy. The Scheme provides a framework for cooperation on foreign policy and foreign relations between Australia’s federal and subnational governments (including state, territory and local governments and public universities).**

The Foreign Arrangements Scheme is established by the *Australia’s Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Act 2020* (the Act) that commenced on 10 December 2020. Under the Act, states and territories, local governments, and public universities must notify the Minister for Foreign Affairs about certain arrangements with foreign national and subnational governments, and foreign universities that do not have ‘institutional autonomy’.<sup>1</sup>

Under the Act, states or territories must notify the Minister for Foreign Affairs and seek approval to negotiate, and to enter, an agreement with foreign national governments. These are known as ‘core foreign arrangements’. If the Minister does not make a decision to approve or refuse the application within 30 days of the notification, it is automatically approved. Other arrangements that are in scope of the Scheme, known as ‘non-core arrangements’, must be notified, but do not require the Minister’s express approval. The Minister retains the power to cancel, vary or refuse to approve negotiation or entry into any arrangement where it is, or is likely to be, inconsistent with Australia’s foreign policy or adverse to foreign relations.

The Scheme establishes a Public Register which includes information about foreign arrangements notified under the Scheme, including certain ministerial decisions. A total of 10,694 foreign arrangements were published on the Public Register as of 31 December 2024.

Information about the Scheme is available at [www.foreignarrangements.gov.au](http://www.foreignarrangements.gov.au).

1. For more detailed descriptions of types of foreign arrangements subject to the Scheme, see section 4 of the Act. Further information about the types of arrangements and corresponding requirements under the Scheme can also be found at [www.foreignarrangements.gov.au](http://www.foreignarrangements.gov.au).

# Reporting requirement

The Act requires the Minister, as soon as practicable after the end of each calendar year, to report to both Houses of Parliament on the exercise of the Minister's decision-making powers under the Act during the preceding year.

Under section 53A of the Act, the report must include:

- statistical information about the decisions made by the Minister under the Act during the year, including the total number of decisions, the total number of decisions in each class of decision, and the outcomes of the decisions;
- a summary of the details of each of the decisions made by the Minister under the Act during the year; and
- an outline of the engagement that has occurred during the year with entities covered by the Act to articulate and explain Australia's foreign policy to those entities and how they should engage with foreign entities in Australia's national interest.

# Decisions under the Act

## Statistical Information

As of 31 December 2024, 516 ministerial decisions have been made over the life of the Scheme, including:

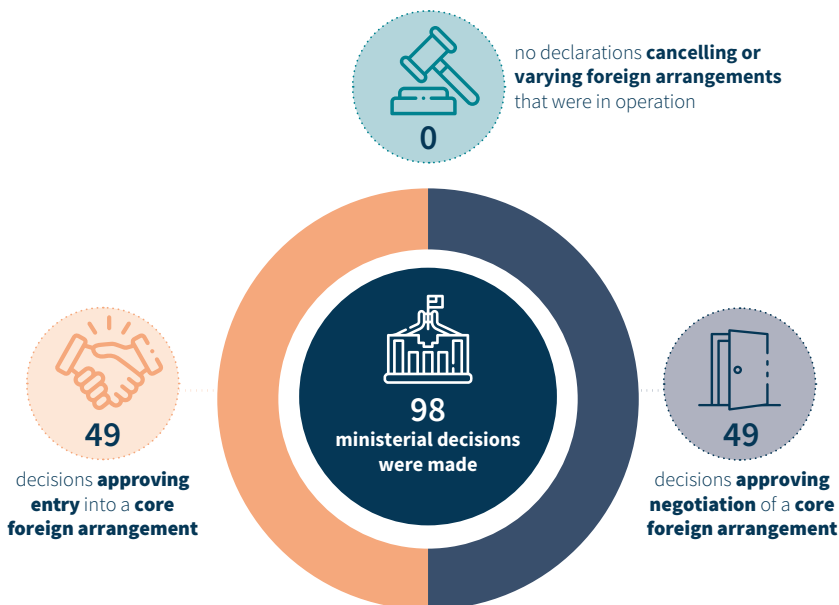
- 200 decisions approving negotiation of a core foreign arrangement;
- 312 decisions approving entry into a core foreign arrangement; and
- 4 declarations cancelling or varying foreign arrangements that were in operation.

Of these, 98 ministerial decisions were made during 2024, including:

- 49 decisions approving negotiation of a core foreign arrangement; and
- 49 decisions approving entry into a core foreign arrangement.

No declarations cancelling or varying foreign arrangements that were in operation were made.

## Decisions Made in 2024



Details of arrangements on which a decision has been made are published on the Public Register unless a statutory exclusion from publication applies (for example, if the decision relates to negotiation of a prospective core arrangement).

The Public Register can be accessed at [www.foreignarrangements.gov.au/public-register](http://www.foreignarrangements.gov.au/public-register).

# Stakeholder Engagement

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) conducts targeted stakeholder engagement and outreach on the Scheme with state, territory and local governments and universities. This work raises entities' awareness of their obligations under the Scheme and supports international engagement initiatives that are informed by, and consistent with, Australia's foreign policy.

The Government announced a legislative review of the Scheme on 21 June 2024. The review included extensive stakeholder engagement with representatives from the Australian Government, state, territory and local governments, universities and peak bodies, and opportunities to provide feedback on the Scheme through formal submissions. The review is addressed in further detail later in this report.

## Foreign Arrangements Scheme and foreign policy outreach

As in previous years, DFAT continued its annual series of in-person engagements in 2024 across all Australian states and territories. The program reaches a wide range of stakeholders and interest groups and is tailored to the differing levels of familiarity with the Scheme. Additionally, DFAT continued to provide foreign policy briefings to ensure consistency of subnational foreign arrangements with national and foreign policy settings.

In 2025, DFAT will continue to focus on university and state and territory government outreach whilst building local government awareness of, and compliance with, the Scheme.

## Whole of Government Engagement

Throughout 2024, DFAT regularly consulted across Australian Government agencies to facilitate a comprehensive and coordinated whole of Australian Government approach to the assessment of foreign arrangements. This included targeted briefings for Scheme stakeholders on specific issues and arrangements.

DFAT also hosted a *National Resilience and Transparency Measures Seminar* with relevant agencies across the Australian Government to instigate more collaborative and cohesive stakeholder engagement by Australian Government agencies.

## DFAT-University Forum

The DFAT-University Forum has become the cornerstone of DFAT's engagement with the higher education sector on the Scheme and related foreign policy issues. Its third iteration was held on 14 June 2024 in partnership with Universities Australia and welcomed more than 100 delegates from the sector and Australian Government agencies. The event featured briefings and panels on a range of challenges in the higher education arena, providing university representatives with opportunities to share their experience with the Scheme and other Australian Government resilience mechanisms.

DFAT will continue to work closely with the university sector – across all levels – as part of its stakeholder engagement in 2025, including through the DFAT-University Forum.

# Stakeholder Engagement

## International environment

DFAT continues to monitor foreign arrangements, in consultation with other Australian Government agencies, to ensure international engagement aligns with current foreign policy settings. The Scheme has supported the Australian Government's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and to the human rights situation in Iran. There are currently no ongoing foreign arrangements with Russia or Belarus and no foreign arrangements with Iran, aside from those relating to individual students.

On 28 November 2024, the Foreign Minister made the Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Amendment (Foreign Entities) Rules 2024 to prescribe a university located in Russia or Belarus as a non-core foreign entity under the Act. This means that from 4 December 2024, any new arrangements with universities in Russia or Belarus are required to be notified as foreign arrangements under the Scheme. In addition, the Minister may exercise powers and make a declaration under the Act in relation to foreign arrangements and subsidiary arrangements with universities in Russia or Belarus, if satisfied that the arrangement adversely affects Australia's foreign relations or is inconsistent with Australia's foreign policy.

As a world-first mechanism, the Scheme has drawn interest from a range of international partners, many of whom have reached out to DFAT to better understand how it operates. Efforts by DFAT and other Australian Government agencies have, and will, continue to inform partner approaches to common challenges.

## Guidance and resources

DFAT launched the *Foreign Arrangements e-Learning Course* in 2024 as an additional resource available to all Scheme stakeholders. It provides a foundation-level understanding of the Scheme, including notification requirements for different entity types and how to use the Online Portal for reporting arrangements. Course content is tailored to meet the diverse needs of Scheme stakeholders to support entities' understanding of, and compliance with, the Scheme.

The *eLearning* course and other Scheme resources are available on the Foreign Arrangements website at [www.foreignarrangements.gov.au/resources](http://www.foreignarrangements.gov.au/resources).

## Legislative Review

Section 63A of the Act requires a review of the operation of the Act as soon as possible after 10 March 2024. On 21 June 2024, the Government announced the appointment of Ms Rosemary Huxtable AO PSM to lead an independent review of the Act.

The review was informed by written submissions, workshops and targeted meetings over a seven-month period. A total of 31 submissions were received from state and territory governments, universities, peak bodies, interested individuals and others. Written submissions are available on the Scheme website (unless submitters requested that all or part of a submission should remain in confidence).

The review seeks to identify possible improvements to the Act and consider the effectiveness of the Act in meeting its objectives. The findings of the independent review were provided to Government in early 2025, with the requirement to then be tabled in Parliament within 15 sittings days.



# Stakeholder Engagement

## State and Territory Entities engaged



**44** universities



**537** local governments



**8** state and territory governments



## Other entities engaged



**9** peak bodies



**3** multilateral groups



**17** foreign governments



**22** Australian Government agencies

## Fourth University Forum attendees (June 2024)



Over **130** attendees from **34** university institutions



Representatives from **9** Australian Government agencies

## Foreign Arrangements Online Portal



Over **1,300** registered users during life of the Scheme



Over **900** active registered users in 2024

## Website hits



**41,967** Website hits





Foreign  
Arrangements  
Scheme

