



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Foreign Arrangements Scheme

Annual Report 2025



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Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Foreign Arrangements Scheme

Annual Report 2025

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 sub-national 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’.¹

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 prior approval. The Minister has 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 whether a decision has been made. A total of 12,941 foreign arrangements were published on the Public Register as of 31 December 2025.

Information about the Scheme is available at 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.

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 to those entities Australia's foreign policy and how they should engage with foreign entities in Australia's national interest.

Decisions under the Act

Statistical Information

As of 31 December 2025, 599 ministerial decisions have been made over the life of the Scheme, including:

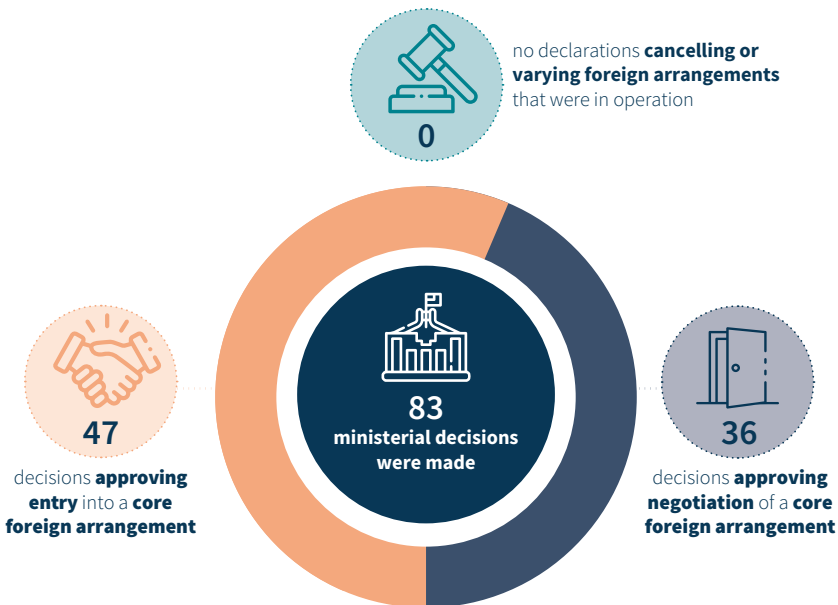
- 236 decisions approving negotiation of a core foreign arrangement;
- 359 decisions approving entry into a core foreign arrangement; and
- 4 declarations cancelling or varying foreign arrangements that were in operation.

Of these ministerial decisions, 83 ministerial decisions were made during 2025, including:

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

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

Decisions made in 2025



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.

Stakeholder Engagement

Navigating a Complex Environment

The Scheme is a world-first mechanism that provides the Commonwealth with unprecedented transparency over international engagement at the subnational level.

Partner countries lacking equivalent visibility of their subnational engagement routinely look to understand how the Scheme operates and how it can inform their own approach to an increasingly complex international operating environment.

This complexity is particularly evident in relation to research security.

In 2025, the Foreign Arrangements Branch led significant efforts to advance a national research security approach that promotes efficiency and consistency across the Commonwealth while protecting valuable research and promoting beneficial collaboration. Agencies explored the development of whole-of-government policy settings, guiding principles, and risk frameworks for research security are among the issues being considered. This work will continue over the coming year.

Legislative Review

Section 63A of the Act required a review of the operation of the Act as soon as possible after 10 March 2024. From June 2024, Ms Rosemary Huxtable AO PSM led an independent legislative review of the Act (the review) that culminated in a detailed report in February 2025. The report and Government response to the report were tabled in Parliament on 1 September 2025 and are available on the Foreign Arrangements Scheme website.

The review found that the Scheme provides an effective mechanism for visibility of arrangements entered into by state, territory and local governments and public universities. The report is detailed with 23 recommendations that focus on administration, governance and transparency of the Scheme and effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The Government agreed, or agreed in principle, with all of the report's recommendations.

Implementing the report's recommendations will enhance the Scheme's focus on high-risk arrangements, minimise resource requirements for low-risk notifications and assessments, and deliver compliance relief for state, territory and local governments and public universities.

Work is already underway to implement recommendations that do not require legislative amendments. In parallel, the Government will seek to amend the Act and associated rules where necessary, to implement the review recommendations. The Government aims to pass amendments to the Act in 2026 to achieve these important reforms.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) conducted targeted engagement in 2025 with state, territory and local governments and universities in line with the Scheme's objectives. DFAT's stakeholder engagement and outreach program supports the international engagement initiatives of these entities, ensuring they are informed by, and are consistent with, Australia's foreign policy.

Foreign Arrangements Scheme and foreign policy outreach

In 2025, DFAT delivered its series of in-person engagements across all Australian states and territories with a particular focus on the outcomes of the review recommendations and implementation.

The review and the Government response were well received by stakeholders, particularly proposed refinements to address administrative burdens, reduce notification requirements for lower-risk arrangements, improve the operation of the Public Register and Scheme Portal, and streamline the operation of the Scheme.

DFAT continued its cross-Commonwealth collaboration to inform engagement with state and territory governments and public universities, with an increased focus on local governments. Targeted engagement with local government supported compliance with the Scheme and the management of international engagement risks. This will remain a priority in 2026.

The outreach program assisted regulated entities in better understanding their ongoing compliance obligations under the Scheme as well as broader foreign relations issues. It encompassed a broad spectrum of stakeholders and interest groups and messages were tailored to reflect the differing levels of Scheme knowledge and experience, while consistently contextualising the Scheme's purpose and operation in the current threat environment. DFAT continued to provide foreign policy briefings to ensure consistency of subnational foreign arrangements with foreign policy settings.

DFAT University Forum

The DFAT University Forum has become a key part of DFAT's engagement with the higher education sector on the Scheme and related foreign policy issues supplementing targeted in-person and virtual engagement. The fourth iteration held on 9 April 2025, welcomed more than 100 delegates from the sector and Australian Government agencies. The event continued to feature foreign policy briefings and panels on a range of challenges in the sector, 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 2026.

Guidance and resources

DFAT has a range of resources available to the regulated community, including a foundation-level eLearning course (launched in 2024), and guidance materials. In 2025, DFAT launched new guidance materials to provide practical assistance to regulated entities in the consideration, due diligence, and drafting of foreign arrangements. The eLearning package and other Scheme resources are available on the Foreign Arrangements website at www.foreignarrangements.gov.au/resources.

Stakeholder Engagement

State and Territory Entities engaged



38 universities



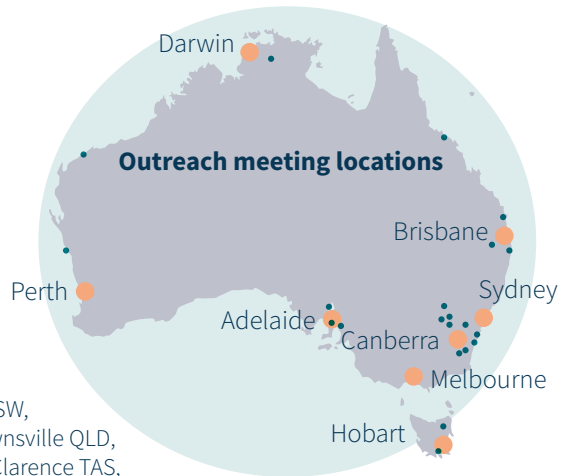
537 local governments



8 state and territory governments

Outreach meeting locations - regional towns

Karratha WA, Geraldton WA, Wollongong NSW, Queanbeyan NSW, Goulburn NSW, Nowra NSW, Cooma NSW, Cowra NSW, Parkes NSW, Bathurst NSW, Orange NSW, Townsville QLD, Sunshine Coast QLD, Gold Coast QLD, Toowoomba QLD, Clarence TAS, Launceston TAS, Whyalla SA, Port Adelaide SA, Murray Bridge SA, Katherine NT



Other entities engaged



12 peak bodies



2 multilateral groups



9 foreign governments



26 Australian Government agencies

Fourth University Forum attendees



Over **120** representatives



from **32** university institutions and **12** Australian Government agencies

Foreign Arrangements Online Portal



Over **1,400** registered users during life of the Scheme



Over **1,000** active registered users in 2025

Website hits



37,374 Website hits



Foreign Arrangements Scheme

