

MEDIA RELEASE

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New Colombo Plan Arrives in the Lao PDR

Up to 50 young Australians will travel to the Lao PDR in 2015 as part of the first group of students deployed to the region under the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan.

Australia's Ambassador to the Lao PDR, John Williams, said students from the University of Sydney, Brisbane's Griffith University and James Cook University in Townsville had been awarded mobility grants to undertake short-term study or research placements, practicums or internships with Lao organisations next year.

The students would gain experience across a range of interdisciplinary fields, including livelihoods and food security, nursing and midwifery, heritage, archeology and tertiary education development.

The students coming to the Lao PDR are part of a cohort of over 3,000 young Australians from 37 universities who have received mobility grants to live, study and work in 32 locations across the Indo-Pacific region under the New Colombo Plan.

Designed to become a 'rite of passage' for Australian undergraduate students, the New Colombo Plan aims to raise the knowledge of Asia and the Pacific among the next generation of Australian leaders. The program involves both scholarships and short-term mobility grants.

Ambassador Williams said he was delighted the Lao PDR would receive students in the first year of the New Colombo Plan, after its successful pilot in China, Indonesia, Japan and Singapore in 2014.

"Australia has been supporting human resource development across the region over many years through our scholarships program, including over 1,100 Australia Awards alumni here in the Lao PDR," Williams said.

"We're now pleased to be able to bring young Australians to Laos, and to our other regional neighbours, to strengthen their knowledge and skills, and to expand the personal and professional networks Australians enjoy across the region."

"For the young Australian students involved, their placements in the Lao PDR will be an excellent opportunity to experience this fascinating country in all its facets, and to get to know the Lao people, who are among the most friendly people I have encountered."

Williams said 69 Australian undergraduate students had also been awarded New Colombo Plan scholarships for 2015. They would spend up to a year in one of 17 countries across the Indo-Pacific region to live, study and work, earning credit for their Australian university degrees.

The Ambassador said he hoped the Lao PDR would be able to host New Colombo Plan scholarship winners in the future, as more quality English-language courses became available.

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