

Go8 unis 'have \$66b impact'

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Education editor

Australia's eight biggest universities have released the report that led to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's reset switch on China and international students.

The Economic Impact of the Group of Eight Universities shows that in 2016 the total economic impact of the sandstone universities was \$66.43 billion.

That included: the direct value of research and the long-term effect of this on the economy; university spending on buildings and salaries of \$19 billion; \$18 billion from international education and its wider economic effects; and \$5 billion from direct and indirect spending on teaching.

In research alone it means that for every \$1 invested in Go8 programs, \$9.76 is generated in downstream economic benefits.

"This is hard numbers. It is enormous. It's the value of education and defence combined. Medicare is in this sort of range. These are very big figures," said the chairman of the Go8, and vice-chancellor of the University of NSW, Ian Jacobs.

"This is about amazing science, amazing interactions of universities with industry, it's commercialisation, it's the whole thing. And it's not just numbers, it's about things like Gardasil [the HPV vaccine], which is saving hundreds of thousands of lives around the world, and it was developed at the University of Queensland."

The Group of Eight said the report, produced by London Economics, was not commissioned to influence Mr Turnbull on the value of international students or the China market, but acknowledged that some of the strongest data related to overseas business. The Go8 reported last week that every three international students create \$1 million in the economy over the lifetime of their degree.

London Economics partner Gavan Conlon said this was based on tuition and non-tuition revenue of \$109,000 multiplied by three - a formula generated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. "One million is big. But it is over the course of a degree. Think of a student as a typical householder and what they spend over three years, and how that flows out into the economy. Those numbers soon add up. Plus sizeable tuition fees."

Dr Conlon said international PhD students were among the biggest contributors, with direct tuition and other spending of more than \$660,000 over the duration of their degrees.

The Go8 said the driver for the report was drawing attention to the economic importance of the sector to government policymakers.

Poor relations between the higher education sector and Canberra turned toxic earlier in the year after the vice-chancellor of the University of Sydney - a member of the Go8, Michael Spence - reprimanded the government over its handling of China and Chinese students.