

'AN EDUCATED CHOICE' INDUSTRY RESPONSE

Next steps for Australia's
engagement with Latin
America



The Council for International Education
Latin America (LATAM) Implementation
Reference Group

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, the Latin America Working Group of the Council for International Education released a comprehensive report, *An Educated Choice - expanding Australia's education, training and research engagement with Latin America November 2018*, on how Australia could increase its engagement with Latin America.

In response to this report, the Council established an Implementation Reference Group (IRG) to explore how best to implement the recommendations of the report. The IRG consisted of experts from the international education sector who have prepared this response to the report.

Australia's international education sector recognises the importance of LATAM as a key partner in furthering the growth of our two regions. The education sector is working hard to align its approach with government priorities both in Australia and in the region to sustainably grow education engagement.

The Council for International Education Latin America Working Group identified four key pillars as critical to enhancing the relationship in the report, *An Educated Choice: Expanding Australia's Education, Training and Research Engagement with Latin America*. The four pillars were: Building Knowledge; Expanding Engagement; Promoting Australia; and Committing to Action. This response sets out priority actions that have been identified by the education sector through the Implementation Reference Group (IRG) aligned to the four pillars.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

Understanding and working more closely with key organisations in the region is critical to building a knowledge pool and creating relationships that enhance the Australia-LATAM relationship. Three key areas for expanding sector knowledge on LATAM include:

- building a database of research organisations and priorities for the region
- developing a LATAM focused network
- connecting more closely with LATAM diaspora.

The education sector is prioritising the development of a comprehensive research database, and establishment of a LATAM focused network to better understand the LATAM region's priorities and seek stronger partnership opportunities.

EXPANDING ENGAGEMENT

To expand engagement in the region, first, it is necessary to understand how the sector is currently engaging with LATAM. To better understand this engagement, the sector is proposing:

- identifying scholarship opportunities available across the region
- exploring consortia opportunities between institutions with complementary areas of expertise
- exploring education and training opportunities for offshore delivery in LATAM.

With a myriad of scholarship opportunities available for LATAM students as well as Australian students to engage with LATAM, raising awareness among education providers of what scholarships exist in-country is critical. A dedicated site that listed scholarship opportunities would allow providers to understand the opportunities available for LATAM students to provide them with a more focused scholarship/educational offer.

PROMOTING AUSTRALIA

To be effective in promoting Australia we need to understand why LATAM students choose to study in Australia and more broadly, why the region values Australian education partnerships. Much work has already been conducted in this area and the sector is currently focused on:

- utilising Australian education providers' expertise for capacity development in English language teaching in LATAM
- understanding how best to engage alumni networks
- strengthening relationships with quality education agents
- improving Australia's digital presence in LATAM
- exploring opportunities for ambassador programs
- promoting education and training pathway opportunities.

While the education sector will work across all of these priorities, a real opportunity exists in understanding what attracts LATAM students to Australia so we can best promote Australia as a study destination. Dedicated market research on consumer interests would support work across all of these items and should be a focus for future action.

COMMITTING TO ACTION

Australia's international education sector is already focused on the LATAM region in education, training and research. To further this commitment, the sector is proposing:

- exploring developing a cross-sector engagement plan for the region
- coordinating joint approaches to LATAM industry events
- continuing to seek implementation of a collective response to the region.

Responding collectively to maximise potential is key and so a core focus of the sector will be the development of a sector-led Latin America Education Stakeholder Advisory Group to coordinate actions identified in this response.



RECOMMENDATIONS



BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

- building a database of research organisations and priorities for the region
- developing a LATAM focused network
- connecting more closely with LATAM diasporas.



EXPANDING ENGAGEMENT

- identifying scholarship opportunities available across the region
- exploring consortia opportunities between institutions with complementary areas of expertise
- exploring education and training opportunities for offshore delivery in LATAM.



PROMOTING AUSTRALIA

- utilising Australian education providers' expertise for capacity development in English language teaching in LATAM
- understanding how best to engage alumni networks
- strengthening relationships with quality agents
- improving Australia's digital presence in LATAM
- exploring opportunities for ambassador programs
- promoting pathway opportunities.



COMMITTING TO ACTION

- exploring developing a cross-sector engagement plan for the region
- coordinating joint approaches to LATAM industry events
- continuing to seek implementation of a collective response to the region.

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

Understanding more and working closer with key organisations in the region is critical to building a knowledge pool and creating relationships that enhance the Australia-LATAM relationship. Three key areas for expanding sector knowledge on LATAM include:

- building a database of research organisations and priorities for the region
- developing a LATAM focused network
- connecting more closely with LATAM diasporas.

The education sector is prioritising developing a comprehensive research database and establishing a LATAM focused network to better understand the LATAM region's priorities and seek stronger partnership opportunities.

Building a database of research organisation and priorities for the region

Currently, no central database of LATAM research priorities and collaborations exists making it challenging to understand the region's appetite for projects. Having an accessible database for the sector to see LATAM's priorities would help the sector understand where potential partnerships could lie.

Macquarie University is currently developing a database of LATAM research organisations that could be shared across the sector. A fee-based structure underpinning access would diminish engagement and therefore a model of open access be it through cooperative or collaborative sourced data inclusion and updates in partnership with the government would be an ideal solution.

Having a database of research organisations adds one dimension to looking for partnerships but understanding what research priorities exist would further refine this. Universities Australia is reporting on their members' current engagement and research with the LATAM region and looking for links between networks and researchers. This is being run as part of the global links survey and could serve as a potential springboard to linking possible research partners.

Ultimately, this information could be combined into a research portal managed by Austrade that identifies research gaps and builds knowledge on research communities and priorities. This would ideally be located on Austrade's website.



Developing a LATAM focused network

The education sector is looking at ways to integrate a stronger focus on LATAM through several approaches. Existing models of engagement between in-country government representatives plus cross-sector stakeholders such as the Australian Education in Vietnam Advisory Group serve as a useful model for future LATAM engagement networks.

Understanding the educational opportunities and gaining market insights in the LATAM region is challenging. Different groups within the sector rely on different points of contact for their information. Better coordinating this through a central point would make the information more effective.

Updates from a dedicated stakeholder group such as the potential model highlighted above could be a vehicle for information updates through existing channels, such as Austrade Market Information Package (MIP) newsletters.

There is an opportunity for the sector to align strategic activities from peak bodies such as IEAA's involvement in the Network of International Education Associations, 3rd Global Dialogue Forum in Argentina in 2020. Outcomes from forums such as this will support successive engagement across sector leaders and could provide a platform for future special interest groups or engagement networks.

Showcasing LATAM through key industry events would also promote the region and raise awareness among the sector. Having a LATAM focused content at events like the Australian International Education Conference (AIEC), and other peak body conferences and events would better inform the education sector on key developments in the region. This requires a commitment from education sector experts and key government representatives to be involved in industry events.

Connecting more closely with LATAM diasporas

Currently, the Australia-Latin America Business Council (ALABC) works with LATAM student groups and businesses through events and networks. Support for their events could foster better connections between appropriate stakeholders and lead to more opportunities for LATAM students. At present, few LATAM student networks exist in Australia. Adding a student membership category to an existing business council would help generate more links between LATAM students and industry.

Utilising a business council such as ALABC for broad engagement in collaborative responses could lead to better outcomes for Australian providers. Greater opportunities must be explored with student leadership groups such as the Council of International Students Australia (CISA) who play a critical role in linking the student community to the education sector, industry and government.

Engaging more regularly with embassies based in LATAM and in Australia would help create stronger networks of community engagement. A joint approach from both the embassy networks and the business community could work well in promoting Australia as a study destination. Organisations like the Council on Australia Latin America Relations (COALAR) could help foster and create relationships between Australia and the Latin American community. COALAR's existing annual grant program could work well in developing these relationships.

EXPANDING ENGAGEMENT

To expand engagement in the region, first, it is necessary to understand how the sector is currently engaging with LATAM. To better understand this engagement, the sector is proposing:

- identifying scholarship opportunities available across the region
- exploring consortia opportunities between institutions with complementary areas of expertise
- evaluating education and training opportunities for offshore delivery in LATAM.

There is a broad range of scholarship opportunities available for LATAM students depending on discipline and scholarship providers. Raising awareness among education providers of what scholarships exist in-country would serve a critical role in stimulating provider and researcher interest. A dedicated website, such as the Study in Australia site, supported by Austrade that listed scholarship opportunities would allow providers to understand the opportunities available for LATAM students in order to provide them with a more focused scholarship/educational offer.

Identifying scholarship opportunities available across the region

Scholarships offer unique ways to promote greater two-way mobility between Australia and LATAM, but it is presently difficult for the sector to review opportunities and respond. For the sector to best respond to the needs of LATAM students, a central repository that details scholarship opportunities would aid in providing more nuanced offers to LATAM students.

Organisations such as ALABC are well placed to work with embassies to put together a comprehensive list of existing scholarship schemes for LATAM students to come to Australia, including internship opportunities. Coupled with data sourced from in-country government representatives, this list will highlight the requirements and objectives of each of the schemes/programs.

The education and business sectors are keen to work with the Australian government to create a single source of information on scholarships that could be hosted on Austrade's website, to expand sector knowledge on this important area.

Exploring consortia opportunities between institutions with complementary areas of expertise

Consortia are inherently complex but offer a real opportunity when implemented correctly. Factors such as size, nuances of in-country politics and norms and who to best partner with all heavily impact the success of the consortia. The sector recognises the value of these consortia and is certainly open to their possibility based on appropriate planning and implementation. However, it is important to stress the financial and legal risks that come with this approach. When properly coordinated with the government, the sector is happy to partner accordingly and would certainly be open to more opportunities as they arise.

The sector notes there is an opportunity for further promotion of Austrade's 'Compete at Scale: Consortia report and toolkit' to assist providers to access opportunities as they arise in LATAM.

Exploring education and training opportunities for offshore delivery in LATAM

To develop and implement education and training products appropriate for offshore delivery in LATAM an effective model of evaluation and insight dissemination needs to be developed. Critical to the model's success will be a clear understanding of the inherent nature of the education sector's systems.

Globally, the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is highly regarded. It is critical that this reputation is protected when developing and implementing any products for offshore delivery.

The frameworks that underpin the VET sector may serve as the basis for further research into opportunities in the LATAM region. Understanding what aspects of the VET system could translate successfully into the region could reveal further opportunities in offshore delivery. TAFE Directors Australia has established strong in-country partnerships that should be leveraged.

TAFE Directors Australia is keen to see the outcomes of the Federal Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business' Pacific Alliance Occupational Standards project, seeing potential in the project's leveraging of Australia's high-quality standards for delivering offshore education and training products.



PROMOTING AUSTRALIA

Promoting Australia means understanding why LATAM students choose to study in Australia and more broadly, why the region values Australian education partnerships. Much work has already been conducted in this area and the sector is currently focused on:

- utilising Australian education providers' expertise for capacity development in English language teaching in LATAM
- understanding how best to engage alumni networks
- strengthening relationships with quality agents
- improving Australia's digital presence in LATAM
- exploring opportunities for ambassador programs
- promoting pathway opportunities.

While the education sector will work across all of these priorities, a real opportunity exists in understanding what attracts LATAM students to Australia so we can best promote Australia as a study destination. Dedicated market research on consumer interests would support work across all of these items and should be a focus.

Utilising Australian education providers' expertise for capacity development in English language teaching in LATAM

To promote and leverage Australia's reputation in English language teaching, English Australia will survey Australia's appetite for teacher training and other capacity-building activities related to English language. This will help shape a picture of not only appetite but give a clearer indication of costs and other key mechanisms involved in a potential offer.

Specialists from the education sector will also consult with the Department of Education and Austrade around the best opportunities and narrow down on priority countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru) in the region. As a model for capacity development, a capability statement will be developed based on Australia's expertise in teacher training and this will be translated into Spanish and Portuguese to be disseminated through Latin America's Education ministries or targeted agencies. This capability statement could be launched as part of a dedicated education sector/ government event within LATAM. Once interest is identified, a refined capability statement or similar document (identifying the interest of providers) can be launched in priority LATAM countries potentially with in-country workshops as well.

Another part of this process could involve the Department of Education working government-to-government with their counterparts in-country to see how LATAM countries train their teachers. This would allow the sector to provide an easily identifiable product that meets specific in-country requirements.

A potential model could be the NSW Government's approach to joint programs with the universities on teacher training, such as those involving Tokyo's Board of Education and Chinese provincial governments. A joint offering involving states and territories could potentially be developed.

Opportunities for other fields, particularly in Vocational Education and Training (VET), should be investigated to potentially adopt a similar model.

Understanding how best to engage alumni networks

The value of alumni networks to support the education sector and national interests cannot be underestimated. Their word-of-mouth promotion and sharing of personal experience is often the most powerful and trusted source of information. Developing an alumni engagement strategy that encompasses all sectors and builds the profile of Australia in LATAM is an ambitious task and requires careful consideration before implementing it.

The education sector notes that the majority of alumni from Australia in LATAM are via English language or ELICOS programs. Whilst the former ELICOS students offer great potential the education sector notes challenges in locating this cohort. As such, it would be beneficial to segment the market between ELICOS and scholarship students. A pilot scheme with the Science without Borders cohort might be an opportunity to gather the contact details for alumni in a more structured manner and anchor these individuals as part of an alumni group. However, the value of this needs to be explicit and leverage the needs of the community whether it is online or in-country engagement. Identifying social networking opportunities might be the start of this process. The goal of these groups is about engaging with Australia in a larger sense and socially having those connections with others.

One possibility of developing this network could involve using a social media platform as a portal for institutions to use to disperse this information to students. However, this needs further researching before any implementation, and privacy conditions would need to be considered.

Bringing together industry groups like ALABC and building on their existing strengths and networks could more widely expose Australia's education expertise in LATAM's business community. Our education industry's alumni engagement strategy needs to Align with the whole-of-government Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy, led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ongoing alumni engagement strategy to succeed.

Strengthening relationships with quality agents

The importance of including education agents in any planning on the LATAM region cannot be stressed enough. Agents are critical to the Australian international education sector with anywhere from 73 per cent to 85 per cent of international students using an education agent in 2017 across all sectors. For LATAM, the percentages are even higher with 90 per cent of Brazilian students using an education agent and 85 per cent of Colombian students doing the same.

The education sector will continue to stress the importance of agents in any strategic approach to LATAM. Australia's global competitors continue to focus on agents as a key source of international students and Australia will do the same.

To strengthen relationships with quality education agents, the sector will continue to explore avenues for working with in-country agent networks focused on quality as well as utilise Australian-based agency networks such as International Student Education Agent Association (ISEAA) to ensure quality is at the forefront when working with agents. The Department of Education's agent transparency initiative can help providers find and work with quality agents.

While institutions are successfully managing their own agency networks, presenting universal collateral that focuses on doing business with Australia and the requirements and expectations of agents will further reinforce our primacy on quality.

Improving Australia's digital presence in LATAM

The use of digital channels and online marketing is essential to cover the breadth of countries across LATAM. Effective use of digital promotion will have a significant influence on prospective students, as well as enable Australia to compete on a global landscape. Promoting Australia via our digital presence must include expanding our available content in Spanish and Portuguese. Translations of key resources, such as those held by Austrade, are critical to this endeavour and the sector is keen to partner with government bodies to prioritise this action. The education sector is keen to support the work of Austrade in developing a digital approach to student recruitment and the promotion of education, training, and research opportunities in Australia.

The education sector is keen to see these strategies advanced with priority. Models of co-investment, particularly in the digital space would function well and quickly lead to creating invaluable resources.

Exploring opportunities for ambassador programs

Education Ambassador(s) to develop institutional relationships and promote Australian education, training and research capabilities clearly enhance ties between regions. Utilising this approach in LATAM is a natural fit for a business council and ALABC is happy to identify Education Ambassadors and previous students who studied in Australia to promote Australia as a study destination. ALABC holds existing networks involving former students who have studied in Australia and are in high profile jobs, and there are a number of these students who could be potential candidates. ALABC would be keen to include these people in their events.

ALABC sees the need to liaise with LATAM embassies to work out the events the chosen ambassadors could be involved in to promote Australian education. Regular liaison with LATAM embassies will be required to identify stakeholders and a formal program or structure to do this.

Promoting pathway opportunities

To undertake outreach activities to onshore students from LATAM and provide tailored, relevant information on pathways options requires closer profiling of LATAM student motivations. The sector would like to see more data and market research related to pathways students before committing to an approach that would best appeal to the needs and aspirations of these students.

The education sector would welcome involvement with and collaboration with Austrade (as lead agency on market research and development) and the Department of Education to undertake dedicated market research to better understand the student cohort and inform pathway promotional strategies.

COMMITTING TO ACTION

Given the importance of the LATAM region in education, training and research, Australia's international education sector is already heavily committed. To further this commitment, the sector is proposing:

- exploring developing a cross-sector engagement plan for the region
- coordinating joint approaches to LATAM industry events
- continuing to seek implementation of a collective response to the region.

Responding collectively to maximise potential is key and so a core focus of the sector will be the development of a dedicated LATAM Education Stakeholder Advisory Group to coordinate actions identified in this response.

Developing a cross-sector engagement plan for the region

To develop an effective plan from a broad group of stakeholders, creating a single coordinating group would ensure the engagement plan best considers the needs of the sector. The development of such a plan could sit within the terms of reference of a LATAM Education Stakeholder Advisory Group, which would give momentum to the work already undertaken in the region.

The creation of a dedicated engagement plan would signify Australia's commitment to expanding engagement with LATAM at the highest leadership levels. The plan will ensure that peak bodies who are currently undertaking activities in the LATAM region present a unified approach, reinforcing our commitment to the region.

Coordinating joint approaches to LATAM industry events

To enhance coordination across Australia's education, training and research engagement, a list of industry events should be compiled highlighting activities for individual engagement and promoting opportunities for a coordinated/ collaborative approach. Having access to this list will ensure targeted campaigns are maximised across the entire international education sector.

Similar to the dissemination of information related to research priorities and scholarships this information would ideally be collated and available via a central agency portal, such as Austrade with opportunities promoted via the Market Information Package (MIP) newsletters and email communications.

Continuing to seek implementation of a collective response to the region

The Council for International Education Latin America Working Group and the Implementation Reference Group developed in response to *An Educated Choice* has created considerable momentum, making now more than ever an ideal time to continue the group's critical work. Establishing a collective advisory group would provide a greater focus on developments in the LATAM region and ensure on-going commitment. Long-term, this would secure greater cross-sector focus on LATAM and continue the mutually beneficial relationship that exists between stakeholders in the education sectors of LATAM and Australia.

The sector-led Latin America Education Stakeholder Advisory Group should be tasked to create the LATAM engagement plan, coordinate joint approaches to LATAM industry events and help drive the sector's focus on the region, ideally achieving significant results.