

# International Engagement in Australian Regional Schools 2019



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *National Strategy for International Education 2025* (National Strategy) highlights the importance of developing international engagement in Australia. The strategy seeks to ensure the ongoing provision of high-quality education to international students, while capitalising on new products and opportunities for the growth of Australian international education. Within the scope of the strategy is the objective of expanding international engagement in Australian regional primary and secondary schools (*National Strategy for International Education 2025*, 2016).

To inform the strategy it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of the current state of international student engagement in government and non-government regional schools. It is important to determine if there is an appetite for and capacity to increase that engagement and understand the barriers, real and perceived. It is also crucial to understand current management strategies and examples of best practice in international engagement. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the Department) has a comprehensive understanding of schools on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). However, currently the Department has limited visibility of other types of international engagement and regional schools' involvement in these. To inform this understanding the Department engaged IPS Management Consultants to conduct a national study of international engagement in Australian regional schools.

Government and non-government schools (including Catholic schools) across the country, school community groups, state and territory education departments and key stakeholders involved in international education were invited to participate. Information was gathered through a literature review, semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions. The research aimed to answer a number of questions which will help to inform the implementation of the National Strategy.

The research established that regional primary and secondary schools offer a range of programs to international students which have been developed and adapted to suit a school's particular situation including capacity, language capabilities and suitable accommodation. These programs included:

- Full-fee paying students (CRICOS).
- Migrant and refugee programs.
- Short-term study tours and visits.
- Exchanges, sister schools and study abroad programs.

While the majority of international students are sourced from Asia, it was evident that engagement is global with growing markets in Europe. It was found that schools currently hosting international students had the desire and capacity to host more students, and those not currently hosting students had a desire to implement programs. Some of the barriers to growth were identified as difficulties in sourcing suitable accommodation, addressing language needs as well as having an understanding of the different types of engagement programs used successfully by other schools.

There is opportunity to develop a communication platform tailored to government and non-government regional schools to enable provision of information, sharing of experiences and a pooling of resources specifically relating to international student engagement. This platform could also be used to collect information relating to student engagement and provide a 'source of truth' to the level of engagement in regional schools.

In summary, there is extensive international student engagement in regional schools across Australia. There is an appetite and capacity to increase that engagement and a willingness to work collaboratively to pool resources and mitigate known barriers. There is opportunity for the Department to work with schools and education departments across the country in order to provide information and support to help the sector grow sustainably and to the benefit of schools, local communities and international students.



## BACKGROUND

The *National Strategy for International Education 2025* (the National Strategy) highlights the value of international education to Australia and its contribution to Australia's services economy. The strategy discusses the opportunity to capitalise on a global demand for education services and provides three pillars of focus, 9 goals to achieve and 19 actions to take. The focus of this research was based on Pillar 3 'Competing globally', Goal 9 'embracing opportunities to grow international education' and action 9.2 'promoting opportunities in regional Australia'. Increasing international engagement within schools is a key component of the National Strategy as such it is important we more fully understand the risks, barriers, demand and capacity of Australian regional schools to ensure the benefits of engagement are shared across Australia.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project were to investigate the appetite, capacity and options for growing international engagement in regional Australian schools and school systems through engaging with a number of key stakeholders.

The research aimed to answer the following questions:

- What does international engagement in regional and remote schools look like in Australia? What type of international engagement is most appropriate and successful/likely to be successful?
- What is the current and prospective appetite for expanding international engagement, including numbers of hosted international school students?
- What does good practice in international engagement in regional Australia look like and how does it vary according to context? What are current successful examples of this? What is the best way for best practice to be shared and celebrated across regional and remote school communities?
- What are the emerging and untapped opportunities for regional schools to engage internationally? Are there examples of innovative practices or enabling technologies?
- What are the main barriers, risks and constraints for regional schools and school communities to engage internationally and how might these be overcome?
- What do schools and school leaders consider the potential student source countries to be? How can issues of sustainability and student diversity be managed?
- What are the main issues around accommodation, costs of living and access to support services and how can these be managed?

This report begins with an overview of literature relating to international student engagement in Australian schools. It is important to note that most of the available literature focuses on the tertiary sector and has been deliberately left out of the review to highlight the lack of literature relating to the school sector and emphasise current knowledge.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature overview presents existing research on international engagement in regional schools. International engagement is typically considered to be schools hosting international students under any arrangement. The current picture of international engagement is discussed in the context of known models of international engagement. The reasons for and benefits of international engagement from the perspective of international students and the Australian Government are also discussed. Additionally, perceived barriers to international engagement are discussed. Finally, best practice for international engagement are also considered. For each of these discussions, gaps in knowledge are identified.

## INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL SCHOOLS

### *Models of international engagement in Australian regional schools*

Government and non-government schools that want to host full-fee paying international students are required to be registered on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). Registered schools must meet and continue to meet, the requirements of *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act) and the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007* (National Code).

Much of the research that has been conducted into international engagement in Australian schools is limited to schools that are CRICOS-registered, including the research discussed below. However, a variety of other models of international engagement exist. As such, it is important to recognise that the current picture of international engagement may not reflect those models of international engagement that do not come under CRICOS-registration.

### *Reasons for and benefits of international engagement in Australian regional schools*

It is important to understand the reasons for, and benefits of, international school students choosing to study in Australia in the context of expanding international engagement in regional Australia. This information can be used to inform marketing strategies at a government and school sector level to attract international students and education agents (Aber & Blackmore, 2010). It can also help to gauge the level of interest of international students in regional schools and help to identify factors that can distinguish the appeal of regional schools from their metropolitan counterparts. In a survey conducted by the Department of Education and Training (2015), it was found that 45% of Year 11 and 12 respondents were influenced in their school selection by education agents and 43% indicated that they were influenced by a friend or relative.

With a greater understanding of the perceived benefits of studying in regional schools and greater communication of these benefits, more effective marketing campaigns can be developed. Similarly, it is important to understand the perceived benefits of international student engagement in regional schools from the perspective of government and schools, to identify effective marketing strategies and gauge the desire for increased international engagement. Another reason is to inform future engagement strategies that best cater towards the needs of international students and Australia. This also applies to outcomes for Australia, whereby a sound understanding of the benefits of international engagement can be used to inform future engagement strategies to maximise the benefits. Understanding the reasons for and benefits of international engagement in regional schools can also help identify additional support needs of regional schools to ensure they are able to deliver on them. The International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) recently launched an initiative to showcase the benefits of international students to the broader community and specifically employers. The initiative aims to increase awareness and understanding of the social, cultural and economic benefits of international education.





### *Educational outcomes for international students*

One reason for international students choosing regional schools is to improve their chances of entering an Australian university. This was identified as a major reason by Year 11 and 12 international students in relation to choosing to study in Australia more broadly (Department of Education and Training, 2015; Forbes & Hamilton, 2005; Ghazarian, 2016). It was found that 80% of the cohort expressed a desire to continue to study after the completion of Year 12, and 76% reported an intention to gain entry into an Australian university (Department of Education and Training, 2015). Other research has suggested regional schools located near universities attract international students who tend to stay longer, and frequently apply to those universities after completion of Year 12 (Forbes & Hamilton, 2005).

### *Cultural and environmental factors for international students*

Cultural and environmental factors were identified as reasons for choosing regional schools. The experience of living and studying in another country provides a unique cultural experience (Department of Education and Training, 2015; Forbes & Hamilton, 2005; Ghazarian, 2016). The opportunity to live close to unique natural environments that are very different from the natural environments of their home countries, was also a benefit identified (Aber & Blackmore, 2010; Department of Education and Training, 2015; Forbes & Hamilton, 2005). The perceived safety of communities has been cited as attractive to international students studying in Australia (Department of Education and Training, 2015; Ghazarian, 2016).

### *Perceived benefits of international engagement to Australia*

Government and other stakeholders held the view that benefits included an increasing market share of international education, building connections with new and emerging markets, and developing stronger international relationships (*National Strategy for International Education 2025*, 2016). In other words, while the economic benefits of growing international engagement are significant, the government also highly values opportunities to develop international relationships. This can focus on an increase of cultural awareness and social engagement, and increases in the global capacity for high-quality education. It is thought that these benefits will improve cultural understanding within regional communities (*National Strategy for International Education 2025*, 2016).



### *Source countries for international engagement in Australian regional schools*

In 2019, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment reported that China (29%), India (15%), Nepal (7%), Brazil (4%), and Vietnam (4%) were the top five source countries for international full fee-paying students on a student visa across the higher education, Vocational Education Training (VET), Schools, English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) and Non-Award sectors (Department of Education, 2019). In the school sector, it was reported that 51% of international full fee-paying students on a student visa were from China, followed by 13% from Vietnam, and 5% from the Republic of Korea (Department of Education and Training, 2018).

The 2015 report 'Growth and Opportunity in Australian International Education' identified China and India as source countries of growth, as well as the Philippines and Thailand (Austrade, 2015). This predictive modelling was generated by considering factors such as student visa grant data, pathway trends, demographics, and economic growth in key source markets across the higher education, VET, Schools, ELICOS and Non-Award sectors (Austrade, 2015). It has also been reported that the Government considers China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Korea, Malaysia, and Hong Kong important markets to pursue for international students across all education sectors (*National Strategy for International Education 2025*, 2016). However, there have been concerns raised that student flow from China could be reversed by Chinese government intervention due to geopolitical tensions, emphasising the importance of exploring all source options.

## **BARRIERS AND ISSUES RELATING TO INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL SCHOOLS**

Literature exploring barriers to and issues around international engagement in regional schools is scarce, however, from the literature available, these can be broken down into broader categories of language support provision, cultural challenges, and marketing.

### *Language support*

Language support relates to the additional support required by some international students around English language comprehension. Several issues have been identified in the context of international engagement in regional schools. A major issue identified is non-language specialist school teachers needing to adapt to provide language support to international students despite restrictions on time and resources (Aber & Blackmore, 2010, Wilkinson & Langat, 2012). Indeed, there is a perception among teachers that these additional teaching requirements are outside teacher responsibilities (Wilkinson & Langat, 2012).

Teachers lacking the skills to ensure inclusion of international students academically has also been raised anecdotally by education employees. A lack of support for teachers to manage the language support needs of international students has also been identified, as well as limited professional development for teachers to build capability in this area (Wilkinson & Langat, 2012). Finally, the issue of language support has been considered from the perspective of international students. It has been identified in a regional secondary school case study that there is very limited English as a Second Language specialist support for international students, and that a lack of English language competency can act as a major stressor for international students and schools, and can significantly impact the academic performance of international students (Aber & Blackmore, 2010; Wilkinson & Langat, 2012).

### *Cultural challenges*

Cultural challenges relate to the challenges experienced by international students as a result of contrasts in the culture of their home country with that of the Australian community they study in. It has been identified that some international school students have difficulty adjusting to a different learning



style than they are familiar with (Aber & Blackmore, 2010). Other cultural challenges include homesickness in terms of food and language, and religious practice considerations such as wearing appropriate religious attire, consuming appropriate foods, and access to prayer services (Ghazarian, 2016).

### *Access, services and associated challenges*

It has been raised by school employees that families of international students prefer to minimise travel arrangements, preferring direct flights and short drive options. This is a particular challenge for regional areas where there are no direct flights. It has also been suggested that promotion of international engagement at a state level tends to favour metropolitan schools over regional schools, and potentially even excludes or minimises the opportunities for regional schools (Aber & Blackmore, 2010). School employees have also cited the high cost of CRICOS registration which is considered inhibitive to international engagement in regional schools. Slow or inadequate internet access/speed to communicate with international parents are also challenges faced by regional schools. This is due to the lack of reliable information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure by regional schools which leads to issues when engaging internationally. Another challenge that has been raised is the limited availability of services in regional areas. This can make regional areas less attractive to international students when considering options of study locations. It may also mean that regional communities feel unprepared to accommodate international students when they arrive. Finally, the international engagement process requiring strong leadership has also been raised as a challenge for regional schools given the lack of experience in international engagement and difficulty of attracting and retaining experienced school leaders in many regional schools.

## **BEST PRACTICES AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES FOR INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS**

In the context of growing international engagement in regional schools it is important to identify best practice to ensure that growth is effective and sustainable.

### *School sector*

At the school sector level, pastoral care for international students has been suggested as critical for success and satisfaction with their educational experience (Aber & Blackmore, 2010; Wilkinson & Langat, 2012). Key competencies include having an understanding of cross-cultural social and learning issues, and a focus on direct and sustained communication between the students, their parents and the school. This is best achieved with the employment of a native speaker to aid communication with non-English speaking parents and to better enable students to communicate issues (Aber & Blackmore, 2010).

Effective and strong leadership was identified as best practice to ensure a whole school approach to inclusion, and ensuring teachers' access to ongoing professional development in relation to engaging with international students (Wilkinson & Langat, 2012).

While often noted as a barrier, the provision of effective English language support to international students, schools and host families should be considered essential. Aber and Blackmore (2010) identified that many teachers who were successful with the provision of language support in their study, had English as a second language background or had gained expertise in language teaching through significant experience in the role. In a broad sense, effective language support in regional schools therefore requires staff with significant experience and expertise in language teaching (Wilkinson & Langat, 2012).



## *Government sector*

At the government sector level, the notion of developing educational clusters has been raised as an innovative practice to international education and promotion in regional schools (Forbes & Hamilton, 2005). The cluster model cited by Forbes and Hamilton (2005) involved Cairns secondary schools clustered with local universities to develop a shared educational strategy with a strong cross-promotional, team-based approach to enable primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions to benefit. The notion of encouraging organisations to work together has previously been raised in the context of supporting regional schools to create new and sustainable opportunities.

The concept involves using a range of anchor organisations such as schools, universities, TAFE, and other registered training organisations and businesses to address needs in a multi-purpose and holistic way (Halsey, 2018). The clustering of school services to improve access to education and support student outcomes by means of partnerships between regional schools and metropolitan schools has also been raised. The objectives of such a clustering arrangement would be to share resources, help with teacher supply, facilitate curriculum diversity, and provide professional development opportunities (Halsey, 2018).

## SUMMARY OF LITERATURE

The literature shows that regional Australian schools come with their own set of challenges compared to metropolitan schools. These include issues attracting and retaining quality teachers, attracting and retaining school leaders, the capacity to manage students with specific learning needs and interests, supporting regional students to transition to higher education, a lack of reliable ICT infrastructure, and school funding being derived predominantly from the number of school enrolments (Halsey, 2018). It is likely that many of these issues present as a barrier to international engagement in regional schools as they are fundamental to their operation.

Given this, the research will consider what support regional schools perceive as necessary to enable them to host international students and engage in other forms of international engagement. Potential differences between the barriers to international engagement for government and non-government schools will also be a key line of enquiry.

Additionally, there is a lack of available data on international student source countries for regional schools. Much of the information and literature is focused predominantly on the tertiary sector and international full fee-paying students, and does not distinguish between regional and metropolitan schools.

Gaining an understanding of student source countries from regional schools will help to inform marketing strategies and support engagement processes. It would also be valuable to compare engagement between government and non-government regional schools.

Other key gaps in the literature relate to identifying best practices for international engagement across government and non-government schools located in regional Australia.

The lack of literature highlights the need for this research into international engagement in Australian regional schools. It is important to understand the aspects of international engagement from different perspectives including the visiting student and their family, host schools, host families and the wider community. It is also important to understand government and support agencies and their capacity to offer support and guidance to grow this sector in regional Australia.



## METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed semi-structured interviews of government and non-government school principals, industry peak bodies, government departments, and school communities.

For the purpose of this study, government schools are defined as those schools operated by state or territory departments, and non-government schools are those that are not operated by a government department. Non-government schools fall into two categories, Catholic schools and Independent schools.

Following a literature review and discussions with staff from the Department interview questions and focus group facilitation guides were developed for each sector (see [Appendices](#)):

- Government and non-government school principals from schools that host international students (in any capacity).
- Government and non-government school principals from schools that do not currently host international students (in any capacity).
- Peak bodies with a role in international student engagement in schools including state and territory Australian Government Schools International (AGSI) representatives, Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) and Austrade.
- School community including parents, citizens and international university students that were currently studying in regional universities (focus group). Note that university students were selected due to being over 18 years of age.

Interview questions and focus group facilitation guides were approved by the Department. Following approval, the National Ethics Application Form from the Australian Association for Research in Education was prepared. The application included all necessary components including interview and focus group schedules, information letters and permission slips. The National Application Form was selected due to all the relevant sectors accepting the form, removing the need to duplicate applications.



## ETHICS

The National Application Form was prepared for ethics approval and sent to the 18 education sectors listed below on 27 May 2019. Ethics approval was sought from all seven states and territories and 11 Catholic Diocese across the nation. The sectors coloured green were approved, those in red declined, and those orange were either withdrawn due to achieving quota or did not respond to the application prior to the completion of the data collection period.

**Figure 1: Ethics application status**

	Location	Response
	New South Wales Department of Education	Withdrawn (no decision)
	Northern Territory Department of Education	Approved (31 July)
	Queensland Department of Education	Approved (18 June)
	South Australian Department of Education	Approved (24 June)
	Tasmanian Department of Education	Approved (2 July)
	Victorian Department of Education	Approved (25 June)
	Western Australian Department of Education	Approved (19 July)
	Catholic Education Office of Western Australia	Approved (29 May)
	New South Wales Catholic Education Armidale	Approved (17 June)
	New South Wales Catholic Education Broken Bay	Declined (14 June)
	New South Wales Catholic Education Canberra-Goulburn	Declined (19 July)
	New South Wales Catholic Education Maitland-Newcastle	Approved (3 June)
	New South Wales Catholic Education Parramatta	Approved (17 July)
	Northern Territory Catholic Education	Withdrawn (quota achieved)
	Queensland Catholic Schools Office Toowoomba	Declined (29 May)
	South Australian Catholic Education	Approved (3 July)
	Tasmania Catholic Education	Withdrawn (quota achieved)
	Victoria Catholic Education Ballarat	Approved (18 June)

Some ethics approvals were received within two days after submitting the application while others took 12 weeks to be approved, most were received within two to six weeks after submission. As ethics approval was received, schools in that region were contacted, in accordance to any approval requirements, and invited to participate.



## RECRUITMENT

### *School recruitment*

Recruitment of school principals spanned the entire data collection period from 24 May 2019 through to 9 August 2019. Principals from all states and territories were successfully engaged and are represented within the study. The recruitment process typically involved:

1. Email invitations sent to school principals at point of ethics approval. The email was an invitation to participate which outlined the scope of the research, what participation involved and a copy of the interview questions, ethics approval letter and consent to participate form.
2. When a consent form was received by email, an interview time was negotiated depending on the principal's availability.
3. To assist with recruitment, follow-up phone calls were made to invited schools that had not responded. This was effective in increasing participation.

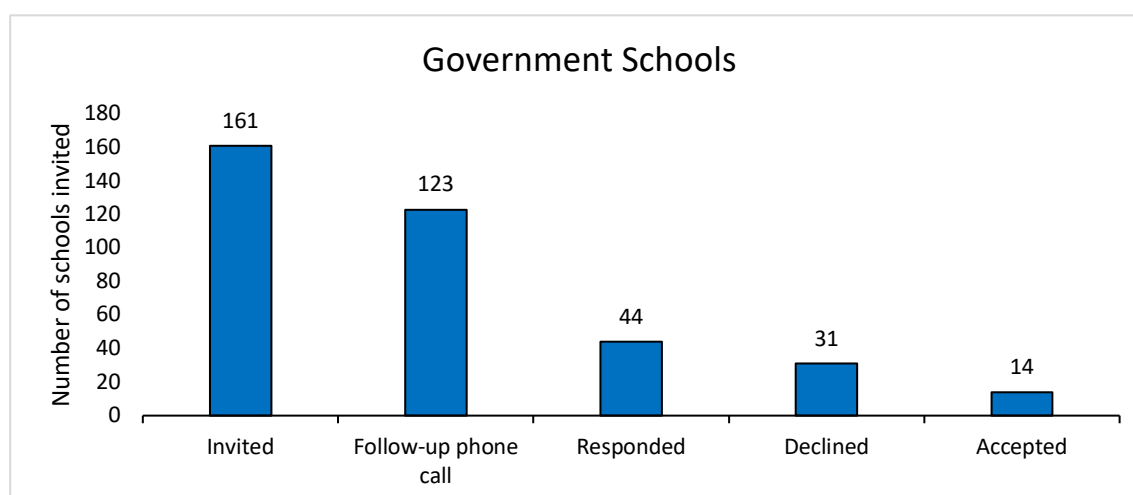
To reach predetermined quotas it was necessary to recruit intensively. The following figure shows a summary of the recruitment process and outcomes. Each school was emailed only once and called once, unless further information was requested by the school.

**Figure 2: Summary of school recruitment**

	Email invitations sent	Follow-up phone calls	Responses	Invitation Declined	Invitation Accepted
Government	161	123	44	31	14
Non-government	288	123	27	19	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>22</b>

The following figure shows a summary of government school recruitment.

**Figure 3: Summary of government school recruitment**

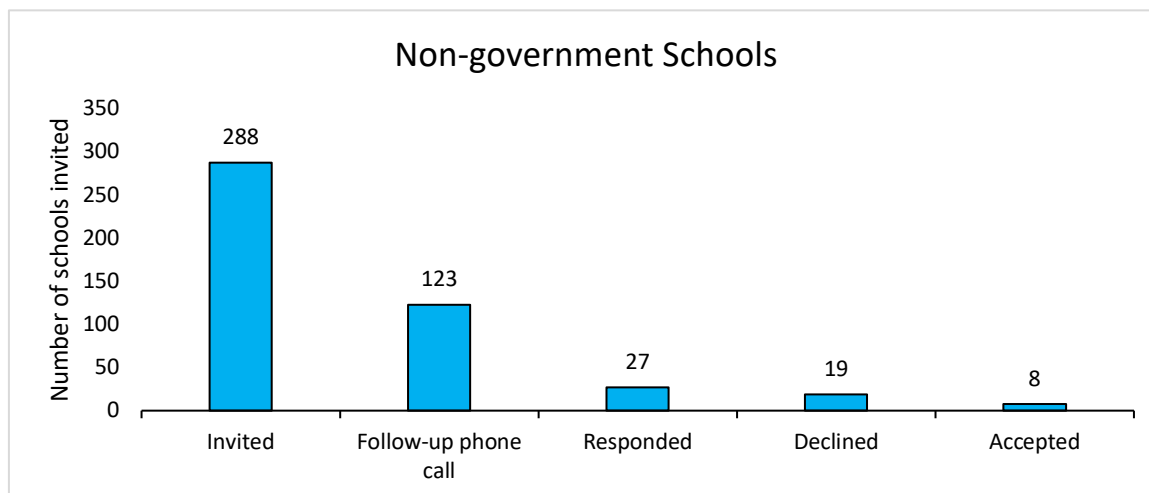


The figure shows that 161 schools were invited via email and 123 schools received a follow up phone call. A total of 44 schools responded, representing 27% of those invited, where 31 declined to participate (70% of those that responded) and 14 accepted the invitation (9% of the total invited to participate).



The following figure shows a summary of non-government school recruitment.

**Figure 4: Summary of non-government school recruitment**



The figure shows that 288 non-government schools were invited via email and 123 schools received a follow up phone call. A total of 27 schools responded, representing 9% of those invited, where 19 declined to participate (70% of those that responded) and 8 accepted the invitation (3% of the total invited to participate).

#### *Stakeholder recruitment*

Engagement with other stakeholders began on 24 May 2019 and was completed on 5 July 2019 with all proposed peak bodies successfully engaged. The following table shows a summary of engagement.

**Figure 5: Stakeholder engagement summary**

Engagement	Proposed	Complete
AUSTRADE	2	2
ISCA	1	1
Australian Capital Territory / AGSI	1	1
New South Wales Department of Education / AGSI	1	1
Western Australian Department of Education / AGSI	1	1
South Australian Department of Education / AGSI	1	1
Tasmania Department of Education / AGSI	1	1
Victorian Department of Education / AGSI	1	1
Northern Territory Department of Education / AGSI	1	1
Queensland Department of Education / AGSI	1	1





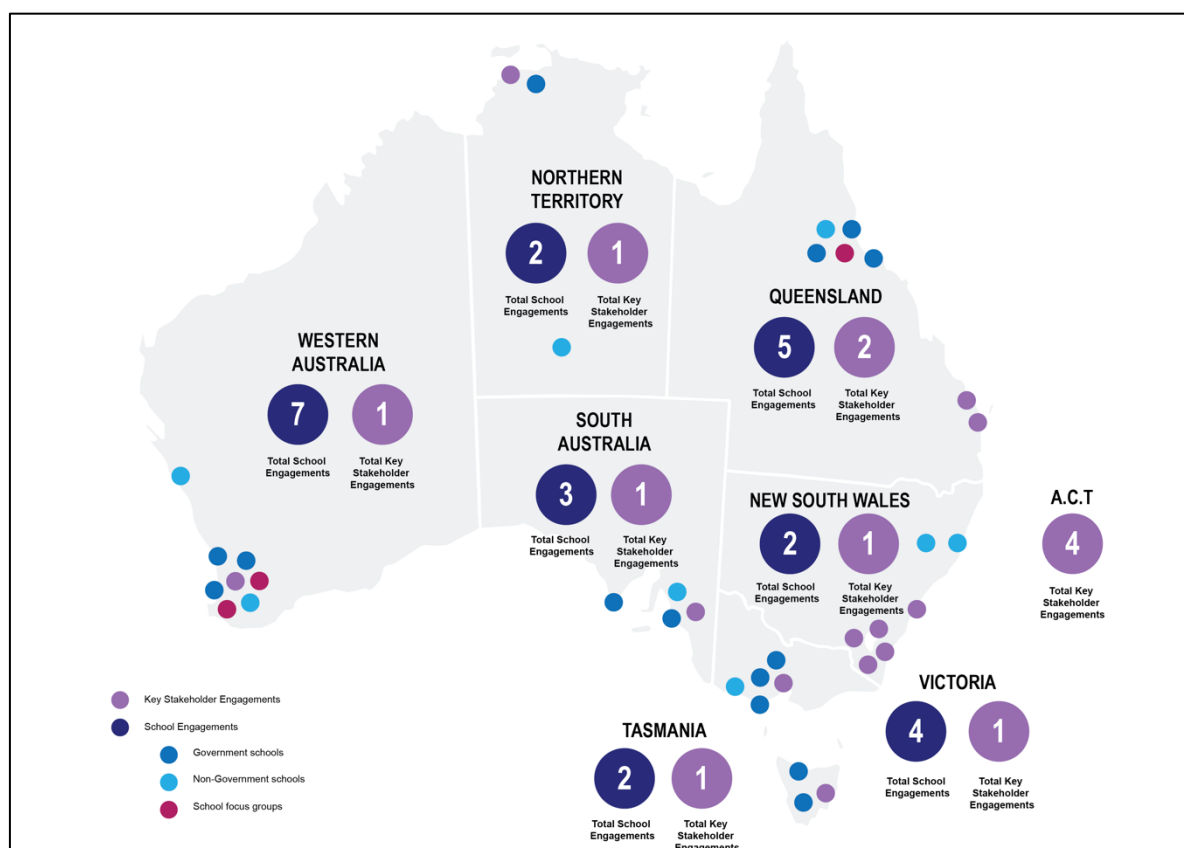
Engagement	Proposed	Complete
Australian Capital Territory Department of Education	1	1
International University Students (Focus group)	1	1
Parents of International Students (Focus group / interview)	1	1

Representatives from ISCA, Austrade and AGSI from all states and territories were successfully engaged.

## SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT

All states and territories were successfully engaged for the project. The following figure shows a summary of engagement in each location.

**Figure 6: Summary of engagement across Australia**



The figure shows that there were a total of 25 school engagements consisting of interviews with school principals and focus groups with community members including parents and teachers. A focus group for international students was also held to incorporate their direct experience of studying in a regional location.



## FINDINGS

*What does international engagement in regional schools look like in Australia?* The research identified a number of different avenues for international student engagement in regional schools. These included:

- Full-fee paying students (CRICOS)
- Migrant and refugee programs
- Study visits and study tours (during the school term)
- Short term study programs (during the schools holidays)
- Study abroad (no reporting requirements – focus is on the cultural experience)
- Exchanges including Rotary
- Sister schools

When asking *what type of international engagement is most appropriate and successful or likely to be successful*, it becomes apparent there are a range of engagement types currently used and that these have been developed and refined to suit a school's needs, context and limitations, while offering international students different options for studying in regional Australia.

## TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN REGIONAL SCHOOLS

This section discusses and explains each of the different avenues of international student engagement identified by participating regional government and non-government schools and other stakeholders.

### *Full-fee paying students (CRICOS)*

The Australian Government promotes study in Australia through a website managed by Austrade. The website provides information to international students detailing opportunities, the application process and visa options.

Students wanting to come to Australia to study in a primary or secondary school have two options. They can apply for a student visa (subclass 500), which will enable them to study up to five years in Australia, or they can apply for a visitor visa (subclasses 600, 601 or 651) which allows them to stay for up to three months.

Schools wanting to obtain CRICOS registration must apply through their designated state authority (DSA). It is important to note that each DSA has its own process for schools to apply for CRICOS registration. Information is available on the following websites:

- Australian Capital Territory: <http://www.education.act.gov.au/home>
- New South Wales: <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/regulation/cricos-label/delivering-courses-to-overseas-students-cricos>
- Northern Territory: <https://education.nt.gov.au/>
- Queensland: <http://www.qld.gov.au/education/international/pages/cricos.html>
- South Australia: <http://www.eecrsb.sa.gov.au/>
- Tasmania: <https://www.tasc.tas.gov.au/>
- Victoria: <http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>



- Western Australia: <http://www.des.wa.gov.au/schooleducation/International-education/Pages/default.aspx>.

Schools that successfully obtain CRICOS registration are required to meet certain conditions which includes a restriction on the number of enrolments a school may have. This restriction may impact schools' ability to increase the number of international, particularly when a group of schools share a common CRICOS registration as is the case for government schools in each state and territory (one CRICOS registration per state/territory retained by the relevant government education department).

## Government Schools and CRICOS

Government schools wanting to host international students are supported by the education authority within their state or territory. Each of these authorities has a position dedicated to international engagement. These education department staff are also members of AGSI, a collaborative association of government schools with international student programs in all states and territories across Australia.

The AGSI member for each state and territory coordinates all aspects of international student engagement for government schools. They assist schools with ongoing support, coordinate with international education agents, and drive growth of the sector. It was found that different states achieved different levels of success with international engagement and successful programs were person based rather than position based. This meant that if the individual was proactive and dedicated to expanding international engagement, success was forthcoming and realised in schools.

While different approaches were adopted in different regions, it was found that the most successful approach was centralisation. Education department AGSI members were offering a full service and support base to government schools in their region. This was found to include:

### *Marketing and Recruitment*

The funds received from international student engagement are re-invested into marketing and recruitment strategies, which are guided by data released by the Department and schools' appetite and capacity for students.

Key markets for recruitment include China, Vietnam, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia.

### *Liaising with Education Agents*

Students wanting to study in Australia will often, and in some cases must, engage an education agent to assist with their application. Agents are required to have a written agreement with the education institution and will liaise closely with the institution to match students with appropriate locations. AGSI members actively liaise with education agents and manage the relationship on behalf of government schools.

*“Education agents are the only way international students can enter our school system. Agents approach us with regards to potential enrolment for students and we manage that process from start, right through to the finish, as far as enrolment goes.”*

### *Provision of Training and Development*

AGSI members provide training and development opportunities to government school principals typically focusing on the value of international programs and the ways they can become involved and training and support to international student school coordinators.

*“We have professional learning programs for international student coordinators”*



*“We have an international student coordinator reference group that meets regularly to share their experiences, issues and best practice.”*

### *Sister School Partnerships*

Creating and maintaining an active partnership with a sister school can be challenging for smaller schools that lack the capacity. AGSI members provide schools with a package of support material while also helping to identify, establish, monitor and review sister school partnerships to maximise the benefits. This reduces the administrative burden and provides schools, particularly smaller schools, with the opportunity to participate.

### *Monitor Legislative Compliance and Generate Policies*

Legislation relating to international student engagement needs to be monitored and actively managed. The AGSI member ensures that schools within their district are aware of and acting within the current requirements. They also assist with policies and other support relating to CRICOS compliance.

### *Strategic Partnerships with other Agencies*

The AGSI member is best placed to develop and nurture partnerships with other governments and agencies to enhance and improve the international student engagement programs within their state or territory. This reduces the need for individual schools to manage these relationships and creates a more open and collaborative environment.

*“We facilitate high-level strategic partnerships with other governments. Currently, we have two with China and are developing a third. We have one with Indonesia and also a province in the Philippines. We have also established 15 sister school partnerships.”*

### *Recognition, Awards and Collaboration*

Some AGSI members support schools through public recognition and awards for high performance international programs. This serves to promote the benefits and quality of international programs both locally and abroad.

*“We’re communicating to all schools regularly about international students. We have other communication mechanisms as well in the form of a regular school update.”*

### **Best Practice**

Offering a centralised service to government schools was found to be most effective for both the DSAs and the participating schools. The services listed above were beneficial to the schools at reducing the administrative burden which meant that more schools could participate in international programs with the comfort of having support and guidance.

Key elements to a centralised approach include marketing and recruitment, admissions, financial management, student welfare and home stay. This enables schools to focus on the student experience.

*“We run the program out of our unit on behalf of all our state government schools. So, we do everything from marketing and recruitment to admissions. We sort all the paperwork that’s required, we manage the financial aspects of the program on behalf of the schools. We look after welfare. We look after the home stay program. It’s almost a full service agency.”*



*“We facilitate the process from start to finish.”*

It was found that states and territories that do not currently offer a centralised service are in the process of changing their model to become fully centralised. This was driven by the success observed in other states and a growing level of collaboration between DSAs.

*“We are centralising the management of CRICOS next year, so that we can release schools from that administrative burden.”*

## Non-government Schools and CRICOS

Non-government schools wanting to host international students are supported by ISCA. ISCA supports schools by providing information to the various associations of non-government schools in each state or territory. ISCA provides information about opportunities that are available and helps schools keep up to date with compliance requirements.

ISCA is a central point for enquiries from education agents, overseas government offices, Austrade and sister school enquiries. ISCA acts as a conduit to direct enquiries and opportunities to non-government schools in metropolitan and regional areas. They also provide limited professional learning opportunities to build capability within schools.

If a non-government school seeks CRICOS registration the school is responsible for generating the application, managing registration and coordinating all aspects of international engagement. This was found to be very inhibiting for most schools, which found the administrative burden disproportionate to the benefits associated with hosting international students.

Non-government schools identified the need for international student programs to be at least four years in duration to enable students to learn sufficient English to achieve educational outcomes. This length of stay was also seen to enhance economic value for the school and local community and provide the student with a complete cultural experience.

It was found that non-government schools utilised other avenues for international student engagement, rather than CRICOS. There were exceptions however, where non-government school associations offered centralised CRICOS support services for schools in their region. This centralised approach meant that clusters of schools could seek CRICOS registration and pool resources for the associated aspects such as marketing, education agents, financial management, home stay and student welfare. This approach overcame many of the barriers for regional non-government schools wanting to engage in international student programs.

## Best Practice and Recommendations for Consideration

As with government schools, it was found that non-government schools identified the centralised, cluster approach to CRICOS registration as highly effective for international school engagement. This was found to reduce the administrative burden and enabled a pool of resources to participating schools including language support, accommodation options and student welfare.



A number of concepts were offered by non-government regional schools to better facilitate their engagement with international students through CRICOS registration:

- A contact list of trustworthy, approved education agents.
- Funding to be allocated to infrastructure such as airports or accommodation facilities rather than marketing and promotion.
- Subsidised fees if the students choose a regional location.
- Connecting local universities and TAFE facilities with schools to address some barriers such as accommodation, language and cultural familiarity.
- Centralised approach to applying for and managing CRICOS registration to enable smaller schools to participate.
- Shared resources, shared experiences, some way of connecting with other regional schools to learn from their experiences and generate an active network.

Austrade provided interesting insight into international engagement from their perspective. There was a view that schools and students experienced challenges with:

- The framework to recruit international students
- The process of CRICOS registration
- Compliance with national codes
- Compliance with the ESOS Act
- The cost of studying in Australia
- The visa application process
- A lack of direct flights to regional areas

Austrade was aware of different types of international engagement and encouraged the development of various modes of engagement to suit the schools environment, especially within a regional schools context.

### *Migrant and refugee programs*

International student engagement through migrant and refugee programs was found to be extensive in government and non-government regional schools. It was found that many schools are currently hosting students, from many different source countries, that are on visitor or temporary visas. Families may move into the region for work or to take advantage of cheaper housing options. However, there are often language barriers, and additional language and appropriate cultural support is needed to ensure a successful transition to the school environment. Source countries and continents for these students included Vietnam, the Philippines, Afghanistan, Asia, Middle East and Africa.

*“We have seven students at the moment who are funded from the English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) and then another eight who are classified under the EAL/D but we don’t receive any funding for those students.”*



*“We have a high proportion of students from refugee backgrounds. Our school is what we call a receiving school, so if students move in as refugees into the broader community, our school is a school that focuses on receiving those students because we have so many and because we have a pool of staff to support their English language learning and to support their cultural change and transition.”*

Schools were managing additional students with current resource levels and this was placing a strain on administration, teaching staff and students. Some schools were unable to consider additional international engagement as they were challenged by their current situation.

*“We have looked at it, but financially, for our students it would be very difficult. We’re below 1,000 on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), so, we’re below the average socioeconomic level. And I think for our school financially it would be very difficult for a lot of our students. Neighbouring schools have gone to Japan on an exchange, which is fantastic. But we’re more focused on the teaching and learning, rather than going over to Japan or hosting kids.”*

While both government and non-government schools identified similar challenges associated with hosting migrant and refugee students, government schools found funding their greatest challenge which hindered their ability to offer comprehensive language support. Funding was not identified as an issue by non-government schools who were managing language challenges by employing language diverse staff where possible.

#### *Study tours and study visits*

Study tours were found to be a very popular way of engaging with international students, especially in government schools. Study tours are short stays that can range from one week, two weeks, ten weeks or six months during the school term. The number of students at a school can vary from one or two up to groups of ten or more. The students are typically accompanied by a teacher from their own school and, for larger groups, a chaperone. Source countries noted included China, Indonesia, Vanuatu, France and Japan.

*“We were very keen to do that as we had very little diversity, cultural diversity on the north-west coast. And so, along with five other schools, that happened at this time of year last year, so we’ve had 22 students at our school, and they were homestay for two and a half weeks. And attended our school those two and a half weeks.”*

The students typically arrived on a visitor visa and host schools noted the ease of administration and management. It was viewed as a very attractive option for regional schools and AGSI members noted that there were more schools interested in hosting students than there is international demand for study tours in regional areas.

While viewed as a very attractive option, there were a number of challenges associated with study tours. These included the difficulty of promoting short study tours to international markets due to the lack of language improvement opportunities, and more pronounced cultural shock for the visiting students. Marketing the experience as a ‘cultural experience’ and an opportunity to ‘try before you commit to a long term program’ were noted as successful strategies to overcome the challenges.

Schools also participated in study visits where, students would arrive for a short term cultural experience. It was also noted that family would often travel with the student as tourists. This



arrangement was thought to bring economic benefits into the regional community. It also provided a marketing opportunity for schools, as families who had a positive experience would return home and encourage their networks to undertake a similar experience or send their children abroad resulting in new opportunities for the school community.

*“Those short term exchange experiences come in under the rules of a visitor’s visa. The students come with their parents, or they come with a family member, and they come to the school for a cultural experience.”*

China is the main source country for study visits with primary school as the most common level of schooling. Other source locations identified included England, Fiji, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Japan, New Zealand, Scandinavia, South Africa and South Korea.

It was identified that educational elements were not the primary focus, nor developing English language skills. The engagement was primarily focused on the cultural experience and viewed as a benefit for the visiting student, the school community, and the greater regional community.

### *Short-term study programs*

Non-government schools were found to host international students through short-term study programs held over the summer holidays. These programs were typically one to three weeks in duration and hosted between six and ten students. Short-term study programs were developed independently of CRICOS registration and developed due to demand. The schools would accommodate the students in boarding facilities, and their families, who arrived in Australia with the student, would tour the local region on holiday.

### *Study abroad programs*

A number of government schools were found to provide a study abroad program to international students. These programs varied in duration from three to twelve months with six months being the most popular. The primary focus was on the cultural experience rather than academic performance and the school did not provide any formal reporting upon completion. Students originated from South America, Italy, Germany and Norway.

### *Exchanges*

Government and non-government schools were found to utilise student exchange programs as a way of engaging with international students and providing their own students with cultural experiences abroad. Rotary Exchange is a common exchange program across the country.

#### *Rotary Exchange*

Rotary is a global network of 1.2 million neighbours, friends, leaders and problem solvers who unite to take action to create lasting change. Rotary Clubs work together on a number of issues including education and youth exchange.

Rotary Youth Exchange provides opportunities for high school students aged 15 to 18 to live and study abroad for up to one year. Each year, thousands of young people worldwide are able to experience cultures in other countries. Students from 27 different countries have the opportunity to stay with Australian host families. While it is not a requirement that the students speak English to come to Australia, it is encouraged and supported through access to a councillor for the duration of the student’s stay. Students enter the country with a student visa. Rotary International has developed a worldwide certification process for all participating clubs and the necessary infrastructure for the program. Government and non-government schools were found to host Rotary exchange students primarily from Europe.





*“Rotary, although it’s not commercial, is a great avenue”*

Rotary manages all aspects of the exchange including accommodation and student support which was viewed as highly desirable by the host schools. Hosting schools willingly accept students and work with Rotary and host families to ensure the international student and local students get maximum benefit out of the experience.

### *Sister schools*

Most government and non-government schools were involved in sister school programs that offered various opportunities for international student engagement. These engagements ranged from exchanges and study tours to the sister school, and hosting students from the sister school, to regular contact through Skype or other forms of video conferencing.

Sister schools were located globally and locations most frequently noted include Japan, France, Indonesia, Malaysia and China.

## SCHOOL PARTICIPATION IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

None of the participating government schools were CRICOS registered. More than half (57%) engaged internationally through migrant/refugee programs and study tours. Exchange programs were utilised by nearly a third (29%) of participating government schools and 7% did not report any form of international engagement.

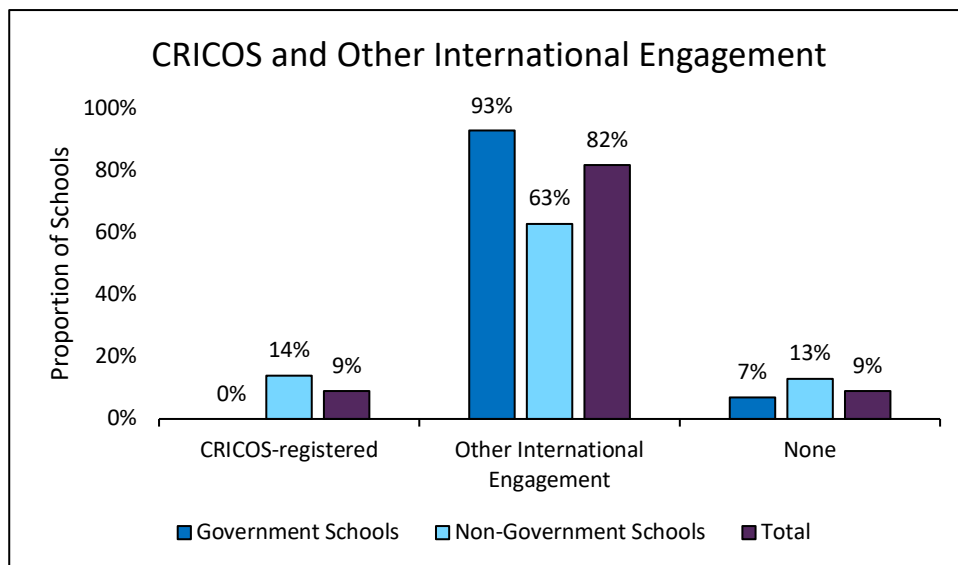
A quarter of participating non-government schools were CRICOS registered. Exchanges were the most frequent engagement process at 63% and migrant/refugee programs were found in half the schools. Study tours and short-term programs were offered by 25%, and 13% of participating schools did not report engaging with international students.

Overall across all schools systems participating in the research, migrant/refugee programs were the main way regional schools engaged with international students at 55%. Study tours and exchanges are well represented within regional schools with a total of 45% and 41% respectively. A total of 9% of schools overall did not report any form of international engagement.

The following figure provides a summary of international student engagement in participating government and non-government schools across Australia. Schools with CRICOS registration have been represented as a separate category. It is important to note that all schools with CRICOS registration also engaged with international students via other methods including short-term and exchange programs.



**Figure 7: CRICOS and other international engagement**



The figure shows that the majority of government schools (93%) participate in some form of international student engagement. A total of 63% of non-government schools engage with international students giving a total of 82% for both combined.

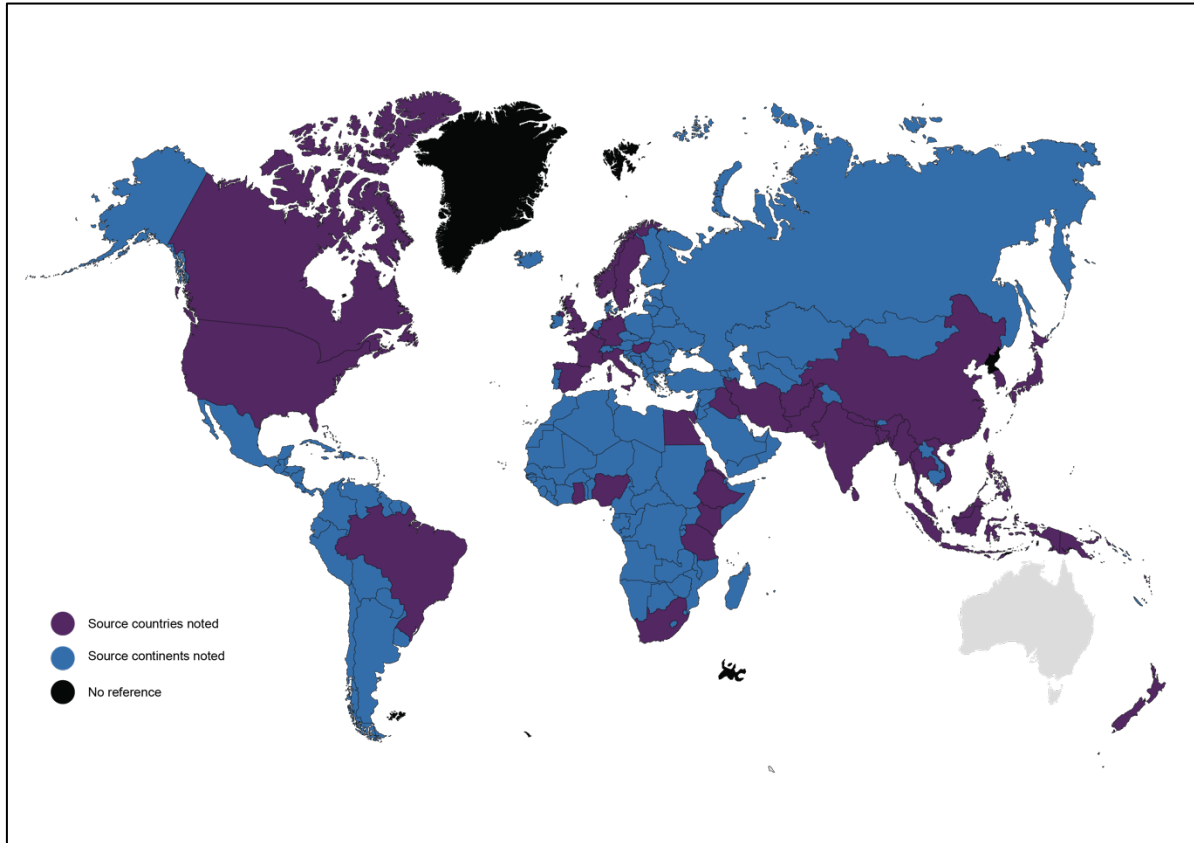
The figure indicates there were no regional government schools in the study that were CRICOS registered. However, this is not reflective of the trend for international school student enrolments in government schools nationally. For example, in 2018, government schools accounted for around 65 per cent of total international school student enrolments.

## CURRENT SOURCE COUNTRIES

Participating schools were asked about source countries for international student engagement. The following figure shows where international students are currently sourced by participating regional government and non-government schools. Some participating schools only provided source continents, these have also been identified within the figure.



**Figure 8: World map showing where international students are currently sourced by participating regional government and non-government schools**



The following figures provide a list of source countries and continents noted by participating government and non-government schools. While there was an assumption that many students were sourced from Asia, this was not demonstrated in the data. While it was established that CRICOS registered schools predominantly sourced students from Asia, other forms of engagement, which far exceeded CRICOS engagement for participating schools, sourced students from all over the world.



**Figure 9: Source countries noted by participating government and non-government schools**

Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Belgium	Brazil
Canada	China	Hong Kong	Egypt
England (UK)	Eritrea	Ethiopia	Fiji
France	Germany	Hungary	India
Indonesia	Iran	Iraq	Italy
Japan	Kenya	Malaysia	Myanmar
Nepal	New Zealand	Nigeria	Norway
Pakistan	Papua New Guinea	Philippines	South Africa
South Korea	Spain	Sri Lanka	Sweden
Taiwan	Tanzania	Thailand	United States
Vanuatu	Vietnam		

Some participating schools noted that their international students came from various continents, without specifying a country. To ensure all source locations are captured, the continents mentioned have been listed in the figure below.

**Figure 10: Source continents noted by participating government and non-government schools (where specific countries were not identified)**

Africa	Asia	Europe
North America	Pacific Islands	South America

## FUTURE SOURCE COUNTRIES

To understand *what schools considered the potential student source countries to be*, participating schools were asked if they had explored or considered other source locations, beyond those they have already engaged. The following is a list of countries noted:

- China
- Indonesia
- Japan
- Hong Kong
- Korea
- Vietnam
- Malaysia



During these discussions it was found that schools were refining their programs and developing parameters that best suited their situation. For example, non-government schools noted that they were more focused on developing relationships with schools that aligned with their values.

*“The thing is we only want to establish links with schools of the same ethos and framework, so we’re looking at links with other schools rather than just links with other countries.”*

*“We would endeavour to attract those that are interested in an academic program.”*

*“We have invested in Japan and not explored other locations. But I think down the track, it’s probably economies of scale, with regard to language learning. It would be easier if students were from a similar language background or cultural background.”*

It was found that government and non-government schools with a higher level of engagement with international students had refined their engagement to fit their situation. They were found to have target numbers that enabled them to offer the best experience for the students, the school and the community, knowing that they could find suitable host families and have enough students to offer support to each other. They targeted the same source market to enable them to focus on language and cultural considerations and, over time, saw the positive impact this had on the entire school community, broadening their understanding and enriching their cultural experience.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND STUDENT DIVERSITY

The issue of sustainability was not raised as a concern directly by schools currently participating in international engagement. However, it was identified by AGSI members as a factor that needed consideration and gave insight into *how issues of sustainability and student diversity can be managed*. The increased growth of international schools overseas was considered a threat to the Australian market and highlighted the importance of identifying and promoting what attracts students to Australia.

The impact of media was mentioned by schools and AGSI members. It was found that when the media reported that international students were taking places in schools to the detriment of domestic students, some schools were challenged by their community to explain their decisions regarding international engagement.

Interestingly, sustainability was an issue raised by schools not currently hosting international students in any capacity. They held the belief that there was no current demand in regional schools as they had not been contacted by agents. They also noted that if international engagement in regional schools was to increase it would need to happen gradually to ensure that effort and investment did not outweigh benefits. They held the belief that there was a need to ensure sustainability to allow for either a return on investment or be cost neutral.

Schools currently involved in international engagement were confident that there was plenty of international interest and the programs they had in place were highly successful and easily sustainable.

Government and non-government schools reported a wide diversity of students from all over the world. While countries like China, Indonesia, Japan and India were frequently cited as common source countries due to proximity, America, Africa and Europe were also mentioned.



## REASONS FOR CHOOSING A REGIONAL SCHOOL

To enable focused marketing strategies and highlight the benefits of regional schools it is important to understand what schools perceive as their unique offering. Both government and non-government schools that currently host international students emphasised the following:

- The natural beauty of Australia, opportunity to see the bush, wildlife, pristine beaches, agricultural areas and regional towns.
- Authentic Australia, a completely different cultural experience from the one offered by a metropolitan school.
- Desirable climate.
- Sweet smelling, clean fresh air.

Government schools also emphasised the safety of a regional location, when compared to metropolitan areas, and a strong sense of community. Some government schools noted that it was difficult to compete with metropolitan schools which they perceived as being more attractive to the students.

*“We always feel that the bright lights are a much greater attraction. The lights of Melbourne.”*

Other government schools highlighted benefits of their school, programs offered and location.

*“I think we’re a stunning school, because of the diversity of our school, because 30% of our school population are from culturally diverse backgrounds. It means that we have processes and strategies and systems set up which ensures that we are highly inclusive and highly mindful of cultural diversity. Our staff are all experienced working with children with limited English skills. We have a team of teachers who can support children to gain English language skills, so I think we’re an ideal school now, and that’s because we’ve had so much experience.”*

*“Our school and location are very attractive, our access to the ocean. Our marine studies program, extracurricular surfing, and our aquatics program.”*

*“We offer a range of subjects that appeal to international students including agriculture, outdoor education, art, food and hospitality. We offer something different.”*

It is also important to understand what schools that are not currently hosting international students identify as their unique offering. While the schools offered similar aspects to those already hosting students, the following were most frequently noted:

- Strong sense of community
- Easier transition into an Australian university
- Quality of education, typically smaller class sizes than metropolitan schools
- Opportunity to experience Indigenous culture
- Opportunity to be within the natural environment, a rural environment and gain a country perspective



- Government schools noted that it was cheaper for international students to study at their schools over non-government schools in regional areas

Overall, most regional schools held the perception that they had a lot of unique aspects to offer international students that metropolitan schools are unable to provide. They held the view that these aspects should be used to attract students to regional areas.

## ACCOMMODATING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Schools were asked *what the main issues around accommodation were and how these can be addressed or managed.*

Accommodating international students was found to be an aspect that required careful consideration and posed challenges for many government and non-government schools.

*“I need to find them a host family, so that’s the most challenging part of the whole program to be honest, so that’s my job. I have done some marketing in our local community and through our website and Facebook and some other forms of advertising.”*

Host families were the most prevalent form of accommodation for international students. This was found to be mostly successful, and all schools were found to have an application and vetting process with ongoing monitoring in the form of home visits.

Host families would typically have a child attending the school and volunteer to host the international student. A number of benefits and challenges were identified with this accommodation option. One of the benefits was the opportunity for the international student to be fully immersed in Australian life, living in a family environment and being engaged with the local community, beyond the school. Host families learnt about the student’s culture, and had the opportunity to share their community with the visiting student.

Challenges included the financial burden on the host family, and a very high level of responsibility for the care of the visiting student. International students experienced cultural shock when first arriving in Australia due to different types of houses, different food, and difficulty with communication as well as feeling homesick.

Personality clashes were also noted, mostly with other children in the household. All the schools had processes in place for dealing with such situations and usually adopted a proactive management model where an engagement officer was available for addressing any issues or concerns. The host family, the student and their family, or the school could initiate discussions to ensure everyone was enjoying the experience. Schools reported that it was rare to remove a student from a host family but always had contingencies in place if that became necessary.

What was interesting was the narrow focus of potential hosts. It was found that many schools only approached families with children of similar age, which not only narrowed the potential accommodation options but excluded ‘empty nesters’.

It was found that ‘empty nesters’ had available accommodation, were financially capable and very willing to host students. Some government schools utilised retirees, particularly retired teachers as they were often known to the school.

Many regional non-government schools are able to offer international students boarding facilities as part of the arrangement. This was thought to be considered highly desirable by the students’ families and enabled hosting schools to provide wrap around care to the students at all times. It did however, reduce the student’s opportunity for engaging with the broader community and having an authentic experience.



Staying with a family member or extended relative was also an accommodation option regularly used by international students, and typically arranged beyond the school. This was essential for young primary aged students that are required to stay with family during their stay as part of their visa.

It was noted that the parents of international students are typically requesting boarding facilities over home stay accommodation. This places most non-government schools with boarding facilities in a strong position, but would impact on most government schools and their ability to host international students, as they do not have boarding facilities to offer. An innovative accommodation idea included a cluster of schools purchasing a house for the purpose of establishing a boarding facility.

However, interestingly some school communities conversely reported that some students had requested to be moved from boarding accommodation into a homestay arrangement. While there may be benefits for the student's mental health, the school must consider other motivating factors, such as less supervision and more freedom.

*“The boarding environment is very structured, and it just doesn't suit some of them. They are better suited in a homestay environment and we've had students who have started in boarding and request to move into a homestay arrangement.”*

## SUPPORT SERVICES AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Schools were asked about the *main barriers, risks and constraints associated with international engagement*. Schools were asked to comment on how these barriers may be overcome and what, if any *support services were available*. It was found that government and non-government schools offer a range of services to support international student engagement. These services are provided to the student and their family, host families and staff within the school.

Schools with extensive engagement over a number of years were generally proactive in their approach to known challenges. It was found that the established processes in place have developed over time as various situations arose requiring effective management.

Schools that are only just exploring international engagement were found to be reacting to situations as they arose. There was little discussion relating to the sharing of, or drawing on, experiences from other schools. This highlighted an opportunity to create an avenue or discussion platform to enable schools to share challenges and solutions.

For each of the challenges mentioned, the solutions used or proposed by schools and school communities are also provided.

### *Communication / language*

The main challenge for all schools is the issue of clear communication with the international student due to language barriers. A lack of clear communication was found to impact a number of different aspects of student, school and host family experience including:

- Students feeling isolated
- Host families feeling anxious
- Pressure on translators in the school being on constant call
- The challenge of proficient communication was noted to be physically and mentally exhausting for the students





*“The hurdles of communication mean that students can tend to become isolated when needing to be able to really be understood by their peers in the foreign exchange context.”*

*“The longer ones, we don't have any issues, it's just a matter of early communication.”*

*“We have 670 students and for 300, English is a second language.”*

The following strategies, *innovations and enabling technologies* are used in regional schools and provide a suite of options for addressing communication issues.

- Schools identified that early and ongoing communication with the student was essential. Student welfare was considered a priority.
- Schools noted the critical importance of having a staff member fluent in the student's language.
- Google Translate was used frequently by school staff, other students and host families.
- Schools reported seeking translators from within the wider community to assist with translation. This was highly successful in some schools where the community member had the same cultural background and could bring an additional element of comfort to the student.
- Schools with particular cultural and language resources, such as a Mandarin speaking staff member, specifically targeted to countries relevant to those resources.
- Best practice examples include the establishment of a communication platform with the student and their family before they leave home. This enabled the student to speak to teachers, other students and the host family before their arrival and continue to use the platform during their stay.
- It was noted by AGSI members that some governments have systems in place that can be utilised by the schools, language centres and translation services. These were not, however, noted by any schools.
- An example of innovation included a 'language line' that operates 24/7, a telephone support system to international students who could speak to a trained support officer in their preferred language. This was found to be highly effective in offering immediate support to visiting students and comfort for their families knowing that any concerns or issues were addressed immediately. This service extended into host family homes and enabled host families to use the service for translation when necessary, minimising the impact of language challenges.
- Another example of innovation was an online language support system, managed by the school and made available to the student, host family and all school staff.

### *Culture shock / homesickness*

Issues around culture shock and homesickness were also frequently cited as challenges for schools and host families to manage. This was particularly emphasised for primary school or young secondary school students that were travelling without any peers. Culture shock was used to describe the students' reaction to houses and sleeping arrangements, food preparation and types of meals, religious differences and schooling structure. Often these cultural differences resulted in a sense of isolation and feeling homesick.



*“It’s a big change for them, the isolation they may feel when they first arrive, the homesickness they may feel.”*

*“From a primary perspective, I think loneliness. The cultural expectations about the way they’re treated.”*

Schools employed a number of strategies *and innovative practices* to address these issues including:

- Government and non-government schools were increasingly using parent information sessions to prepare host families. These sessions went beyond a simple group meeting and included information about the specific student staying with them, their dietary likes and dislikes, religious practices and social interests. The sessions were designed to create a level of comfort for the host family in having a better understanding of the student. These sessions were found to be increasing in popularity within schools and were reported as invaluable by hosting families. Reinforcing this, other host families that did not receive the benefit of these sessions said they felt unprepared when their student arrived and, when compounded by language challenges, found it took a long time to get to know them.
- Other schools used a liaison officer approach where a school staff member was allocated to oversee the welfare of the student. This would involve organising visits to the host family home and ensuring that the student was integrating within the school and engaged in sporting and social events.
- The importance of preparing and making appropriate food was highlighted by many schools. There was the perception that this helped in situations where students were feeling homesick, and also contributed to them feeling welcome within the host family home. Consideration such as religious practices and specialised diets were noted by many schools. It was suggested that students be invited to cook for their host families, as this offered an opportunity to share their culture.

It is important to note that a number of schools held the perception that nothing could be done to reduce culture shock or help with homesickness. Given the successful strategies employed by some schools this highlights the need to collaborate and share experiences as well as the importance of proactively seeking solutions.

Interestingly, the provision of religious needs was not identified as a challenge. While discussed by both government and non-government schools, it was found that these needs were identified and met for all students and catered to all religions.

The final point to note relates to diet and the abundance of cheap non-nutritious food in Australia. Host families noted that this was of particular concern when the students would consume these foods excessively.

### *Mental health care*

Closely linked to culture shock and feeling homesick is mental health care. It has been noted separately to highlight some key strategies schools are using to manage international students’ mental health. The most important aspects to the effective management of mental health was early and



ongoing support, assigning the task to a staff member and taking a holistic approach with shared responsibility.

*“I think the mental health one... The orientation program for international students, and any boarding student, needs to be considered a long-term activity.”*

Schools utilised the following:

- Providing the students with a comprehensive orientation inclusive of who they can contact when they need support. Articulating what types of situations and the support on offer also helps students understand that they do not have to wait until a problem arises to reach out for support.
- Ensuring students are involved in extra-curricular activities, such as sport, community social activities and events.

A number of issues were raised that need careful consideration. Some schools commented that it was a challenge to encourage integration where students from the same country would often group together, rather than interact with the other students.

Issues surrounding racism were also identified and it was clear that some schools may benefit from professional development to address some of the unconscious bias that was evident during the engagement process.

### *Schools System Challenges*

Schools identified that international students were often accustomed to a particular type of schooling system, particularly students from Asia where schooling is highly structured. Studying in Australia gave these students a sense of freedom they may not have experienced which needed to be managed carefully.

### *Gaming addiction*

Incidence of gaming addiction was noted by schools as an issue of increasing concern and often linked to social isolation and poor behaviour. Only one approach to overcome a gaming addiction was shared.

*“We go cold turkey. We take their devices off them. Then later, when they commit to our approach, they can have a laptop. There’s no devices overnight. They’re locked up during the day. We just minimise their time on the device and get them out, get them doing other things. Eventually, they wean off it. But you can tell when they come back from Christmas holidays that they’re right back on it again. Their parents don’t keep it going.”*

### *General care and support*

Schools noted that ongoing support for the students was critical to successful engagements. In addition to liaison officers and dedicated staff being responsible for student welfare, local school students were also identified as providing support. Schools noted that young leaders would take responsibility for the international student and ensure that their experience was positive and they were actively engaging with the other students. Some schools used the buddy system, others assigned a mentor to liaise between the international students and teaching staff to ensure ongoing monitoring.



School community members identified opportunities to enhance their experience and offer guidance on some challenging situations. There was suggestion of a 'guidebook' and guidance when making important health decisions.

*"It would be good if the school could develop a 'guidebook' for exchange students and host parents that helps both look at the different values and cultural challenges. There is very little formal support offered for host families, but I know it is something that we are looking at and we want to improve on."*

*"It can be really challenging for homestay parents. We have to make decisions on exchange students based on our cultural values. I had to make a decision about vaccinations for the flu for my children and I wasn't sure what I should do with my international student. I had to try to talk to their parents back in Japan and again the language difficulties made it hard but it was something that we just didn't think about so we were placed in a difficult position. The school can provide some advice around these types of issues also so we can always seek assistance."*

## APPETITE TO HOST INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Schools that do not currently host international students provided interesting insight into reasons why they do not, the key challenges and suggestions to encourage their involvement. It was found that along with a perceived lack of interest by international students, and being thought of as an undesirable location, schools were heavily focused on delivering education to their current cohort and had not considered international engagement.

In general, their understanding of international engagement was limited to being registered with CRICOS and they had not considered other forms of engagement. They were unaware of other schools' activities and felt they lacked the capacity and necessary resources.

Both government and non-government schools were able to list some benefits to the school and what they could offer international students. These included an inclusive education, country experience, a sense of community as well as personalised education within smaller class sizes.

When asked what was needed to encourage their involvement, the main factors given were accommodation, assistance with language, knowing what types of engagement were available, and understanding the process, market and level of commitment required by the school. They were also interested in hearing about other schools' experiences, especially schools of a similar size and location. The development and sharing of case studies could help to address some of these needs while offering an avenue for sharing best practice, ways to overcome challenges, and an awareness of the different support mechanisms.

## APPETITE TO HOST MORE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

When exploring the *current and prospective appetite for expanding international engagement*, there was a strong desire and available capacity to increase the level of international student engagement within schools by government and non-government regional schools, AGSI members, Austrade and other key stakeholders. Schools already hosting students suggested an increase of around 30% and schools not currently hosting international students, had the desire and capacity to do so. It is important to note that this applies to all types of engagement, including CRICOS.



Government schools showed a dependency on AGSI members to coordinate all aspects of international student engagement, and while they had the desire to increase engagement, they were not acting or choosing to become involved in the process.

Non-government schools identified a desire to increase numbers with some schools wanting as many as 50 students per annum, through the various engagement programs they offered.

Schools generally cited sourcing suitable homestay accommodation as one of the main factors limiting growth. Some schools felt that their school was not a desirable location and were initially unsure how to overcome the challenge. When asked what made their school and region attractive they were able to list numerous reasons including being able to provide their students with a more global perspective, fostering a sense of pride in their community, and sharing that with international students. Economic benefits were noted along with increasing international networks and tourism opportunities.

There was a general view that any growth should be carefully considered to ensure that regional schools were given the same opportunities as metropolitan schools. There was also the view, held by schools, that the government (state and federal) emphasised growth in metropolitan areas to the detriment of regional locations. It was noted that regional locations needed additional government funded resources such as transport infrastructure, staff and student support.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

It has been established that both government and non-government regional schools use a number of different programs to engage with international students, including and beyond being CRICOS registered. It is important to acknowledge these engagements and consider whether the Department can support, help develop or collect data and report on activities for the benefit of the sector.

Some regional schools indicated the CRICOS registration process in its current form is restrictive. However, government schools were well supported through their state or territory education department and AGSI members, where applications were prepared and registrations managed on behalf of the schools. This centralised approach minimised the administrative cost for schools, enabled resources to be shared across the region, and meant that any regional government school could consider involvement.

Non-government schools were also provided with support through ISCA although a need for more support to enhance engagement was evident.

The centralised or cluster approach for CRICOS registration was found to be highly successful for both government and non-government schools, and hence warrants development in all regions and territories.

A centralised approach could also be used to address language and cultural challenges by fostering relationships between local schools, the community, TAFE and universities. In this way they can be encouraged to share resources and support international student programs. This would ease pressure on schools directly, and expand language opportunities across the region. If done well, this approach could be seen as an attractive element to education agents and prospective international students and their families.

The growing number of migrant and refugee programs in regional schools was having an impact bringing many of the challenges associated with international student engagement but few of the associated benefits. This has been identified as a situation that needs further investigation as many of the schools, both government and non-government, would benefit from focused assistance and support, particularly in terms of language support. Some schools reported up to 40 different language needs within their school.

Other forms of engagement such as study tours, study visits, exchanges, sister schools, short term study programs, and study abroad programs were all found to bring benefits to the school, local



community and international students. They were flexible in their delivery, focused on cultural experiences, and the schools were found to provide wrap around support to the students and host families. The diversity of options meant that most schools were actively involved in some form of international engagement to suit their context, and were able to manage the limiting factors such as sourcing suitable accommodation and language challenges.

It is recommended that these options be promoted to other regional schools not currently engaged and who may not be aware of the types of programs they could use to experience the benefits of international student engagement. In addition to activities currently being delivered by the IEAA, this could be achieved through the development of a communication platform, available to all regional schools and designed to address knowledge gaps, share experiences and resources, and foster a sense of community across the nation. The Department could use the platform to provide information and collect engagement data, list education agents and highlight new markets and engagement opportunities.

The platform could be designed to enable schools to share experiences and case studies including challenges and effective solutions. Opportunities for professional development, specifically related to international student engagement in regional schools, could also be shared through the platform to create an awareness of programs available or to be delivered directly through the platform.

In conclusion, there is a suite of options available to government and non-government schools wanting to be involved in international student engagement. While challenges were identified, viable solutions have been provided and opportunities for additional support discussed. It is evident that regional schools have the desire and capacity to increase their current level of engagement. This includes accessing and utilising examples of best practice and employing cluster models that can both support regional schools engaging for the first time and schools that are already involved in international engagement activities.



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## APPENDICES

### STAKEHOLDERS

#### Austrade

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade) is responsible for the international marketing and promotion of Australian education and training. These activities contribute to Australia's economic prosperity by helping education institutions develop international marketing and promote international education. Austrade delivers branding, international marketing and promotion services on behalf of the Australian education sector which includes positioning Australian education internationally through the international education brand, Future Unlimited. Austrade also supports Australian education and training providers through a range of tailored services to support their international education engagement strategies, including accurate and timely market intelligence.

Through an extensive international network, Austrade is well-positioned to identify quality opportunities and timely market intelligence. Information gathered in-market is disseminated to the Australian education sector to assist providers make informed decisions and craft strategies to develop international relationships and business. A key priority is the development of transnational education opportunities in growth and emerging markets, especially in Asia.

More recently, Austrade has worked with the international education sector to develop a long-term market development plan to enable the sustainable growth of the sector into the future.

#### AGSI

Australian Government Schools International (AGSI) is a collaborative association of government schools with international student programs in all states and territories across Australia. AGSI promotes government schools as quality providers and provides expert advice, leadership and support for international student programs. AGSI members work cooperatively to share best practice in support of international students. AGSI members work within their respective state or territory education departments.

#### ISCA

Independent School Council of Australia (ISCA) represents the interests of the Independent school sector on a national basis, such as in relation to Australian Government funding and representation on national policy making bodies. ISCA is based in the ACT with a small secretariat providing direct services to schools in the areas of administration of targeted program funding, curriculum support, professional development and industrial services.

In relation to international student programs, ISCA focuses on advocacy through the use of national and international evidence-based and data-driven research and collaboration with other key stakeholders. They also ensure independent schools are represented in policy development and engage with the media, politicians, key stakeholders, opinion leaders and the broader community. Of key importance is their communication with schools to ensure they have accurate and reliable data relating to international student engagement and are able to meet compliance requirements.

#### International Students

International students were identified as any students from abroad studying within an Australian primary or secondary regional school. This included students on student visas for long term study, typically full-fee paying and attending a CRICOS registered school. It also included students on visitor visas studying for a shorter period, often at schools that are not CRICOS registered and where registration is not necessary. Students on any other visa were also considered which included students on a dependent student visa, dependent work visa, tourist visa or as a refugee.



## INTERVIEW GUIDE: REGIONAL SCHOOLS (PRIMARY AND SECONDARY | GOVERNMENT / INDEPENDENT / CATHOLIC)

Does your school host international students?

Yes

1. Tell me about international student engagement at your school
  - a. Explore study tours / exchange / language programs / school partnerships / cultural learning experiences / video link-ups etc.
2. What makes your school a desirable place to visit over a metropolitan school?
3. Where do your domestic students originate from?
  - a. Rural / remote / regional
  - b. Local / commute / board
  - c. Where do domestic students that are not local stay?
4. Which countries are the international students from?
5. What other international markets has the school explored or considered?
  - a. If none – why not?
6. Where do the international students stay/live while attending school?
7. Who do they travel with (peer / alone / caregiver / school staff)?
8. How long do they typically stay?
9. Do you have the capacity / desire to host more students?
  - a. Yes – how many – why don't you host that many now?
  - b. No – why not?
10. Tell me about the benefits experienced when hosting these students
  - a. School view
  - b. Local student view
  - c. International student view
  - d. Local regional community
11. Tell me about any challenges the school experiences when hosting these students
12. Tell me about sourcing suitable accommodation
13. Tell me about any challenges you believe the international students may have
  - a. Religion
  - b. Culture
  - c. Food
  - d. Language
14. In your view in what ways could these challenges be addressed?
15. Other comments



No

1. Has the school considered or previously hosted international students?
  - a. Why (explore deeply)
  - b. Why not (explore deeply)
2. What do you think your school could offer international students that metropolitan schools can't offer?
3. Tell me about the benefits associated with hosting international students
  - a. School view
  - b. Local student view
  - c. International student view
  - d. Local regional community
4. In relation to any barriers, what support would help the school decide to host international students?
5. What would encourage your school to consider hosting international students?
6. Other comments

## INTERVIEW GUIDE: EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

International Student Engagement Sectors (capture contextual factors)

1. Tell me about the different ways international students can engage with regional schools (allow respondent to say types of engagement and then explore each – benefits / challenges) examples include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Study tour (short term)
  - b. Exchange (teachers / students)
  - c. Sister schools
  - d. Language programs
  - e. Etc.
    - i. Explore the benefits of each of these
2. In your view, do regional schools in your state want to host international students?
  - a. Why / Why not
  - b. How do you know this?
  - c. Do you / the Department have the capacity and capability to help them do this?
    - i. Yes – explain
    - ii. No – why not, what do you need?
3. In what ways does a broader focus on international engagement help or hinder a school's recruitment or retention of international students?
4. In what ways do you facilitate the process?
5. What challenges are you aware of in the process (local level / national level) for schools / international students / etc.?
6. What could be done to overcome these challenges?
7. Tell me about exploitation and how you provide safety for the students / schools / community.



8. Tell me about the relationships you have with international connections that work with you to get students to Australia.
9. How do you determine their legitimacy?
10. In your view what are the risks of increasing numbers of international students – in a regional context?
11. Tell me about the benefits of regional schools hosting international students.
  - a. School view
  - b. Local student view
  - c. International student view
  - d. Local regional community
12. In your view what can regional schools offer international students that metropolitan schools can't?
13. How well do you communicate with other people in positions similar to yours in other states?  
In what ways would this communication benefit different regions?
14. Any other comments?

## INTERVIEW GUIDE: AUSTRADE / ISCA / AGSI

1. Tell me about your role in international student engagement in regional primary and secondary schools
2. In your view, do regional schools want to host international students?
  - a. Why / Why not
  - b. How do you know this?
3. In what ways do you facilitate the process?
4. What challenges are you aware of in the process (local level / national level) for schools / international students / etc.?
5. What could be done to overcome these challenges?
6. Tell me about exploitation and your role in ensuring safety for the students / schools / community.
7. Tell me about the relationship you have with the various departments and agencies within Australia to facilitate international student engagement.
8. Tell me about the relationships you have with international connections to get students to Australia.
9. In what ways are you involved in checking their legitimacy?
10. In your view, what are the risks of increasing numbers of international students– in a regional context?
11. Tell me about the benefits of regional schools hosting international students
  - a. School view
  - b. Local student view
  - c. International student view
  - d. Local regional community
12. Any other comments?



## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS (REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMUNITY, P&C, TEACHERS)

1. Tell me about international students visiting the school.
2. What types of engagement activities does the school undertake
  - a. Sister schools
  - b. Exchange programs
  - c. Study tours
  - d. Etc.
3. Please share your experiences with international students visiting the school or other types of engagement with international school (for the school / students / international student / community).
  - a. Benefits
  - b. Challenges
4. In what ways did the school support the international students?
  - a. Culturally
  - b. Socially
  - c. Other support
5. In what ways did the school support hosting families?
  - a. Cultural awareness
  - b. Language and Food
6. Tell me about the level of engagement with international students at the school (how many how often).
7. What are your views on that level
  - a. Want more – unpack (what is stopping you / how can that be overcome)
  - b. Want less – unpack (why)
  - c. About right – tell me about that
8. How important is it that international students visit your regional school? Why?
9. Other comments

## UNIVERSITY STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about your experience studying in Australia

- a. Benefits
- b. Challenges (language / culture / food / safety / technology (access and speed of Internet))
- c. Culture
- d. Social
- e. Educational
- f. Other comments



## PARENTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS THAT HAVE STUDIED IN AUSTRALIA

Tell me about your experience with your child studying in Australia

- a. Why did you choose Australia?
- b. What are the benefits to your child of studying in Australia?
- c. What challenges did you experience in the process / travel / accommodation / cultural differences / food / social / safety concerns / communication
- d. Who helped you with the process – tell me about that?
- e. Would you recommend the experience to other parents?
- f. Other comments.

