

AUSTRALIAN STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION  
STRATEGY SUBMISSION  
STUDY TOOWOOMBA



**1. What are the key priorities for a new Australian Strategy for international education?**

Australian international education should be one of the main pathways for migration and talent programs in Australia, contributing to human capital development. Our focus on research and world leading results also needs to be promoted from the federal level.

International Student opportunities should complement existing domestic student delivery not compete against it. Vocational education qualifications should include the opportunity to participate in work placement aligned to the qualifications being studied. Students should be able to participate in shorter vocational education qualifications that could be as short a 6-12 months if that is the duration of the content that they wish to study. This is particularly relevant to vocational qualifications and a suite of new Micro-credentials being offered across the Australian market.

**2. Students should be at the centre of the new Strategy. How can Australian education providers deliver the best possible student experience both now and in the future?**

The best experience for a student is achieved when they are able to enrol in programs that contains a mix of domestic and international students. International students want to have a cultural experience as well as an educational experience. Too often international students are concentrated in particular programs or locations where their study experience is diluted by the sheer volume of other international students. Regional locations offer a better experience to student to integrate into a community at the local level.

A consistent and coordinated approach to international student arrivals is required. The provision of welcome kits, community organised cultural assimilation events, basic skills workshops to help students sort out the basic elements of living in a foreign country such as Australia should be a mandatory part of all CRICOS registration. Regional centres have an ability to do this more efficiently and with greater personalisation than some of the larger metropolitan cities. The student experience needs to be as fulfilling and information centric for all students everywhere in Australia – only then will our reputation as the Destination of Choice for international students be enhanced.

All international education institutions should offer excellent health and wellness and counselling programs for international students – both on campus or in consultation with local providers. In addition, study assistance programs should be a priority for all institutions who take on international students. .

**3. What changes are needed to make Australia more globally competitive over the next decade?**

- i. Policy and regulatory flexibility are important in enabling providers to innovate. How can we utilise these settings to pursue opportunities, and in what other ways can we work together to ensure Australia remains globally competitive?

Visa approval process should not be tied to the duration of training programs. There are many vocational opportunities that can be undertaken in shorter durations (6-12 months) or longer opportunities such as apprenticeship programs.

The requirement for evidence of funds to support living expenses should be revised for those students taking up places in a regional area as the cost of living in these centres is significantly lower. This will relieve one significant barrier to entry for some students.

In addition if our strategy included the ability to recognise offshore study as an eligible criterion for Post-Study Work Rights (PSWR) visa for students who cannot come to Australia due to the current border closure then we would have an advantage over some of our competitors.

**4. How can providers, governments and stakeholders work together to achieve diversification opportunities (for example of disciplines, source countries, study destinations and delivery models)?**

International opportunities still focus on 3-4 year university qualifications with only a smaller percentage accessing vocational education. There are many opportunities for students to undertake shorter vocational qualifications at the Diploma or Cert IV level but we are constrained by the CRICOS requirements of minimum face to face hours and weeks of study.

By relaxing these rules to better encompass blended or flexible delivery models, students could be able to access a wider variety of programs including vocational education.

Regional areas have an opportunity to be attractive to those international areas that have similarities to Australia whether it be a strong agriculture industry, a relatively similar climate or simply the size of the community the student is currently living in. International students certainly want the Australian lifestyle experience but having one or two areas that are familiar to their home makes the experience more comfortable.

Toowoomba is one of Australia's biggest education hubs with over 100 schools and education institutions in our region. Our diversity for both independent and

denominational boarding schools, extremely high-quality state primary and high schools as well as a world class university campus, TAFE campus and over 40 registered training organisations gives Toowoomba a huge advantage for students considering international study. We have everything on our doorstep, an international airport 20 minutes from the CBD and we are 90mins down a dual lane highway to the heart of Brisbane. If the federal government were to help promote the advantages of regional education and boost our local economies by supporting both financially and promotionally the benefits of a regional Australian education for our international visitors then our regional growth plans would be achieved considerably more quickly.

**5. What are the necessary skills for the future that students should be prepared for?**

- i. How can Australia improve employability outcomes for international students, ensuring they have the necessary skills to compete in a globally competitive labour market?

Employability skills such as communication, (including good English language skills), team work, technology skills and leadership skills are critical to improve employability in Australia. The focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills transfer shouldn't be limited to domestic students. These are transferrable international skills that are the backbone of employment globally. We want our graduates to be competitive in a global jobs market as that improves our reputation as an education leader in the world.

**6. How do we create a uniquely Australian education experience?**

**1. What is our value proposition for both international and domestic students?**

There needs to be a range of 'Pathways' available for both domestic and international students. Our education focus should be on a plan for students from Year 11 as either domestic or international on-shore high school students, through to VET, University or other tertiary study and then build in links to employment, practical work experience and supported traineeships – not just for those jobs considered 'trades' but for professional and white collar workers as well. A pathway program for every student that is flexible enough to adjust if their plans change but gives everyone an idea of how to find what they love and how to educate themselves to build a career doing it.

**2. How do we offer an Australian education experience while complementing the value of Australian offshore and online education?**

Spreading the location of international students across more regional and rural locations instead of them all congregating in the larger cities (Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne) will provide a more uniquely Australian experience. Smaller regional locations have a lot to offer international students and often harness the best of lifestyle and cultural experience due to basic proximity to wildlife, our native bushland and wide open spaces.

The unique proposition Australia needs to focus on in the current Covid recovery period is the proficiency with which we tackled the pandemic and the vast areas of Australia that were largely unaffected by the virus. This is especially relevant for those international markets who didn't fare so well and which were our emerging markets here in Toowoomba due to cultural and demographic similarities – India, South America, Vietnam.

**7. Community support for the international education sector is important for the sector's social licence. How can the benefits this sector provides to Australia be better understood by wider community?**

Link international students into existing community and business organisations. These could be by encouraging more regional training opportunities, or by utilising the structures already present in the community. I.e. church groups, sporting clubs, community organisations, social organisations.

Opportunities for intergenerational and intercultural mixing will improve the support for international students in our society and raise the profile of international students. Toowoomba has over 16% of our population already born overseas so we are a diverse and welcoming culture. There are many regional centres similar to Toowoomba around Australia who would welcome International Students warmly.

The role of our study clusters is to promote our region as the ideal destination but to then help facilitate scenarios in which the students stay on in our city to live and work post study. Those students in the VET sector who complete often shorter courses and with fair consideration given to allowing changes to the current structure in this area, will become our advocates. A shorter, less expensive and fully immersive cultural experience for international students makes sense and Australia's larger regional areas such as Toowoomba can offer this.

There are opportunities for the Council to be more transparent and strategic. An increase in consultation with the relevant industry bodies such as UA, RUN and IEAA would be a key part of any successful strategy.

Overall the international education and tourism sectors need to have a more integrated approach and make decisions based around the ongoing skills shortages in the first instance.

**8. What else should the Council for International Education and the Australian Government consider in developing the new Strategy?**

Border restrictions until mid of 2022 will be an obvious impediment to the implementation of any in-person strategy. Online options that involve using advanced technology for delivering coursework and practical aspects to training will need funding. Larger universities are now mostly technology ready for this but smaller VET providers and some ELICOS institutions could need support financially and with sourcing technology in order to remain in the competitive marketplace going

forward. Incentives for students to choose regional areas to study versus those larger traditional metropolitan cities could include:

- Fully integrated cultural assimilation program provided by local study cluster such as Study Toowoomba to each arriving international student
- Funding support for laptop and internet access. – discounts provided by larger telco providers
- Regional study tours provided virtually to education agents and supported by federal government
- Confirmed VET placements for practical components prior to arrival in Australia and a federal commitment to support employers financially to take on these employees in an apprentice structure post completion of study