

Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030

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

International education is critical for global competitiveness in the knowledge economy to secure Australia's economic prosperity. It is also critical for protecting our sovereignty and promoting a rules-based and secure Indo-Pacific region through academic diplomacy.

To achieve this, Australia's strategy for international education should aim for an international education sector that provides sustainable and high value returns throughout the education and research sector. Maintaining a large, vibrant, and diverse international student cohort is central to achieving this aim, but the priorities for the strategy must stretch beyond recruitment of fee-paying international students, even if growth is achieved from more diverse source countries.

With regard to international students, priorities should include the diversification of international student source markets, supported by a compelling Study in Australia brand which clearly articulates the high quality and distinctive characteristics of both living and studying in Australia. It should maintain a strong focus on the recruitment of onshore international students, with appropriate and competitive visa and other policy settings, while supporting opportunities to develop offshore and novel delivery modes. It should not be assumed, however, that delivery of Australian programs offshore can be a quick or easy substitute for onshore enrolments.

In addition to fee-paying international students, the strategy should prioritise international exchange throughout the Australian research and education sector. This includes ongoing support for and expansion of the New Colombo Plan and other initiatives. The New Colombo Plan, for example, should be expanded to include other regions of the world where Australia has existing or emerging strategic interests. Consideration should also be given to leveraging the success of the New Colombo Plan to support international exposure and experience for doctoral and early career researchers, as well as emerging leaders in other industries. Programs should be established to provide small grants and fellowships to international researchers to spend time in Australia to develop international collaborative education and research activities.

The strategy should also prioritise maintaining and growing the flow of international Higher Degree by Research students and graduates. Such students and graduates are critical to meeting the research workforce needs of Universities and the national economy, particularly in emerging areas of strategic priority. Ongoing barriers to the mobility of these researchers, whether originating from COVID or other factors, represents a challenge to the sustenance of our research excellence and threatens our sovereign capability in critical fields.

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?*

Providing a high quality and high value experience for international students is critical; it is also the responsibility of whole Australian community, including education providers. International students' experience of life and learning in Australia will inform their perceptions of and ongoing affinity with

the country. Ensuring their experience is the best it can be is fundamental to achieving the long-term benefits of international education.

For education providers this means continuing to provide world's-best education experiences, with quality assurance supported by the ongoing adherence to ESOS standards and national frameworks. Students should also be supported to engage with Australian life and culture. At the University of Adelaide, for example, international students and domestic students are linked and taken through a mediated intercultural learning experience in an innovative program called [Global IQ - Connect](#). Moreover, a fit-for-purpose education requires a global focus. Australia should be renowned for producing graduates with global perspectives and experience. This is critical for international students, many of whose careers will have a global dimension. Ensuring Australian students graduate with global perspectives and experience is also critical for Australia's ability to compete in a globalised world.

Providers must also ensure international students are able to access the full range of support services, and that those support services are, where necessary, tailored to the needs of international students. The University of Adelaide's award-winning [China Career Ready Plus Program](#), for example, provides specialist support, internships and opportunities for Chinese students, with a special focus on opportunities with employers in China.

Government must also ensure that Australia presents a unified and welcoming stance towards international students, characterised by a 'team Australia' approach. This should be supported by messaging that a vibrant and globally integrated international education and research sector is in the national interest, and that the presence in Australia of international students is a key element of this.

A clear, flexible and welcoming visa regime supported by competitive post-study work rights opportunities is also critical, as are clear policy setting about future workforce needs and areas of skills shortage. Government can also support international students with enhanced education, monitoring and protections with regard to workplace exploitation of international students.

The support of business is critical too. Good availability of diverse and high-quality accommodation options, for example, plays a key role in students' lived experience. The business community also needs to work closely with education providers to provide enhanced opportunities for work integrated learning, ranging from traditional internships and placements, to project based and other diverse experiential learning. There is a significant opportunity for Government to support and incentivise business' participation in such programs.

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?

The Australian Government should continue to work closely with the international education sector to ensure that Australia has a flexible, transparent and responsive visa regime that can strike a balance domestic considerations and international competitive pressure. This includes providing flexibility for states to utilise international education-related visa categories to support state strategic priorities such as population growth and development of priority industries. Better utilisation of post-study work rights visas, for example, can both provide a competitive advantage for Australia, as well as meeting critical workforce needs.

Education standards are necessary to ensure Australian programs and student experience are of a consistently high quality. However, as institutions innovate with new online and offshore programs, care must be taken to ensure that the application of standards developed in the Australian context are applicable to the mode and location of delivery, and do not inhibit development of new opportunities.

Continued refinement of and positive messaging about Australia's foreign compliance regimes will help universities pursue and develop international education opportunities. As foreign compliance regimes mature, Government and institutions can work together to develop a clearer sense of categories of activities which are agreed as benign, and in which the Government has less compliance interest. Student exchange, and arrangements relating to inbound mobility of undergraduate students, for example, may prove to not warrant further consideration by the Commonwealth.

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

Universities such as the University of Adelaide have been focussed on market and product diversification for a long time. Prior to COVID significant progress had been made towards market diversification, and the development of online offerings has been a priority for a number of years. Post-COVID, the imperative to diversify is even greater, as are the challenges we face in doing so.

Institutions are well equipped to pursue market development activities in line with their priorities and targets, but efforts will be significantly assisted by a clear and coordinated approach to presenting the value proposition of studying in Australia. As mentioned previously, this is best achieved through a 'team Australia' approach built on a common understanding of Australia's appeal developed through comprehensive engagement with institutions and deep market insight.

The support that Austrade and diplomatic missions provide is very important and needs to be continued. This includes both generic information available through sources such as the MIP, as well as market knowledge and updates from Australian missions, and tailored advice and support, particularly for new ventures and market entry strategies.

For disciplines considered strategic priorities, particularly at the doctoral level, Government, industry and institutions must work closely together to attract the highest quality students and researchers to Australia's education and research ecosystem. This can be achieved through collaborative PhD programs jointly funded by industry and Government. In certain disciplines, for example cyber- and defence related fields, Government can mediate relationships with other governments to provide opportunities for student and researcher international exchange and engagement that can support development of sovereign capability.

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?

A fundamental objective of international education is to develop global citizens who are ready to provide future leadership and work together to solve the world's most pressing problems.

Students graduating from Australian universities have the discipline knowledge, technical skills, creativity, teamwork, communication and many other skills needed for success in their chosen careers. Both international and domestic students, however, also need the opportunity to develop

intercultural skills and global awareness to ensure they are equipped to succeed and lead in the global, and globally competitive, labour market.

Intercultural skills and global awareness need to be proactively developed through mediated intercultural experiences such as the University of Adelaide's Global IQ – Connect program mentioned above, or through structured international exchange and other study abroad programs. Their development also needs to be deeply embedded into the mainstream curriculum. Simply living and studying among diverse cultures does not ensure intercultural competence.

The Australian education experience must also be internationally focussed to the extent that it meets the needs of graduates seeking employment in Australia, students' home countries, or further abroad. For many graduates, their Australian education needs to prepare them to work in multiple countries, and to productively engage with diverse cultures and employment systems.

Embedding diverse and, where possible, internationally focussed work experience and work integrated learning into education programs is critical to achieving positive employability outcomes wherever students choose to pursue their careers. This can be supported by concerted national and State-led initiatives to enhance local employers' awareness of the benefits of facilitating experiences for international students. Key stakeholders in this are Australia's diaspora business communities, many of whom are former international students, and overseas alumni networks. Members of these communities are ideally placed to host work integrated learning experiences, and to support international students transition to work in Australia or in their countries of origin.

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

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

Our value proposition rests on a combination of the Australian lifestyle and culture, and the excellence of our education and research systems. While the learning experience students have in Australia may be similar to that in some other leading overseas institutions, Australia has the opportunity to provide a combination of lifestyle and opportunity unavailable elsewhere. This includes:

- The opportunity to learn in an environment which is geographically and culturally straddling east and west
- A warm and welcoming Australian community and culture, experienced also through all interactions with Government processes and systems
- Australia's cosmopolitan and multicultural community, where students of all countries may find a local community of co-nationals
- The inherent freedoms of Australia's open society
- The global connectivity of our people, lived through experience in a globally connected education and research system
- An education experience which provides a springboard to a career in Australia or anywhere in the world
- A world-leading education system with institutions that provide the most advanced knowledge and skills
- Unparalleled student support and services provided by institutions
- Safety, security and stability

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

Onshore education for international students will remain the primary focus of institutions, and maintaining the quality and positive outcomes of the learning and living experience in Australia is fundamental to the prospects of Australia's international education in the future.

Opportunities in online and offshore education should be approached as necessary elements of Australia's efforts to diversify its international student sector. The standards for excellence that Australia is known for must be upheld in all instances of offshore delivery. Low quality offerings or unscrupulous providers threaten the reputation of Australia's entire international education sector.

As much as possible, Australian programs delivered offshore or online should aim to carry through on the value proposition of any onshore Australian program. Students should experience education excellence, global connection and strong employability outcomes, and while doing so develop an appreciation of and affinity for Australian culture.

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?*

The community's appreciation of the benefits of international students depends on their understanding of the benefits of a globally focussed education and research system as a whole.

Australians are justifiably proud of our country's achievements in research and innovation, particularly when we are competing and leading on a global scale. The international mobility and engagement of students and researchers has been central to our achievements over the last century, and the mobility of contemporary international students should be seen as part of the same continuum. Their success as students with us now will translate to our success in the future.

Consequently, while the story of economic, trade and employment outcomes needs to be told, the benefits of international education should be understood in terms of its contribution to Australia's world-leading and globally engaged research and education system, a system in which all Australians have a stake.

Further, international education should be seen as something that Australians are encouraged to participate in rather than observe others (international students) doing. Just as overt support for mobility of international students to Australia must continue, so must we provide ongoing and overt support for the international mobility of Australian students and academics at all levels (once borders reopen). Outbound international experience needs to be developed as an integral part of the Australian education system.

When the value of Australian students' and researchers' international mobility is understood, the benefits of international students in our system may be more readily appreciated.

Continued investment in and broadening of the New Colombo Plan over the long term is therefore critical. This includes increasing participation, including new markets such as Latin America and Middle East/North Africa, and developing new initiatives for the school and VET sectors.

We also need industry (and Government) to be clear and unequivocal about the extent to which they rely on international students to support various parts of the economy. It is important to be clear that developing sovereign capability in fact requires the import of foreign skills and the development of local skills through international engagement.