

Q20.

Australian Strategy for International Education consultation submission

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Q6. 1 - What do you see as the key priorities for a new Australian strategy for international education? [limit to 500 words]

Asia Education Foundation (AEF) [<https://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/>] commends the work to date of the Council for International Education and the Australian Government in the framing of the next international education strategy for Australia. The areas and potential themes currently scoped are well-matched to the required work ahead in building services, certifications, and relationships for international education. However, some areas require more clarification and emphasis. Most notably the strategy could further develop the visioning of the ten-year horizon. The constant mention of the pandemic and its ongoing implications potentially limits the strategy to a 3-4 year set of goals. The strategy could look beyond the current negativity and market shifts. Envisioning the study experience of students in different contexts in 2031 might help articulate exactly what services and experience the strategy is setting out to create. While naturally there are shifts in market interests away from China, there should be a much bigger strategic focus on Australia's region of across the Indo-Pacific. Which countries and provinces might be growth areas for international education? What relationships should we support and continue to foster? The answers to these are crucial to a strategic growth agenda, notably with nations like Indonesia. Nonetheless, continuing to support and enrich the relationships with China is essential. It would be unwise to imply that China is no longer a priority, since China has been the biggest contributor to international education and Chinese diasporic communities are integrated in Australian society. The strategy needs to navigate this, including how key inbound and outbound programs demonstrate the great relationships and collaboration that can be achieved through education, despite geo-political and economic tensions. In emphasising the considerable importance of Australia's relationship and status in the Indo-Pacific, there should be an acknowledgement around the declining participation in Asian languages in schools and universities. Languages are one of the key levers in developing global competence, and while we seem to expect international students to speak English, Australia cannot hope to reciprocate if our youth have neither the attitudes nor skills to equally engage and show respect. The strategy must acknowledge the complimentary value and need to ensure global competence is well defined. The Consultation paper uses words like 'global competence', 'intercultural understanding' and 'intercultural capability', without much explanation of what constitutes this terminology. The OECD [<https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf>] has developed some key measures around global competence that could help inform and guide this strategy, and the results from the 2018 PISA test, which had a component test on global competence, highlighted key strengths and gaps for Australian teenage students. Likewise, revisions to the Australian Curriculum should feed into the 10-year vision, as well as the Alice Springs Mparntwe Education Declaration. The IES Strategy should not sit by itself but demonstrate its intertwined and considered linkages with other significant education statements and systems. A priority to make education more seamless and integrated for Australia with the world would be a worthy 10-year goal.

Q7. 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? [limit to 500 words]

It is heartening to see students positioned at the core of the strategy. However, it is somewhat ironic that so many education systems have done this before, only to fail at really valuing and listening to what it's like to put students at the centre. The strategy would need to significantly ramp up the role of student voice and experience if it is to honour this structure and design. Perhaps the student could be viewed as two halves, one side Australian and the other international, working together and moving between different cultural and educational contexts. Given the emphasis on earlier terminology about global competence and intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes, greater awareness of the required mindsets and skillsets should be part of the student experience and equally for providers. Intercultural learning for all needs to be at the heart of the experience to enable students and providers to navigate and negotiate within different cultural contexts. It is positive to have statements that highlight the "the opportunities to learn valuable intercultural skills which help prepare our graduates for a globalised workforce", but they are empty without some frameworks or strategies that actively support this to happen; not just assume it does. AEF has developed a framework [<https://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/docs/default-source/strategy/aef-strategy-sept-2020-2023.pdf>] to support such thinking and action – this identifies the need to support learners in framing their own understanding (the knowledge needed to overcome assumptions, stereotypes, and implications of prejudice) and their capability (regarding the skills in empathy, respect, and reaching resolutions across intercultural contexts). AEF would be happy to support the Council in utilising the further details of such frameworks in helping students to feel prepared and confident, and for providers to appreciate the potential requirements and expectations of their approaches. Given the emphasis on digital delivery in the Consultation paper, providers must be supported to better understand the nature of this work. There appears to be a wide spectrum of service delivery even across tertiary institutions and schools, which could be better supported and guided by advisory services or frameworks for digital delivery including training and intercultural competency considerations. It should also be noted the considerable role of mental health and wellbeing for stakeholders, something not mentioned in the Consultation paper, but clearly a mitigating factor in ensuring the online or blended experience can be sustained. AEF has been working across the Indo-Pacific for nearly 30 years, with much of that work building partnerships between schools and education systems. The role of school partnerships and other youth programs in fostering greater collaboration between Australia and the Indo-Pacific should be recognised as significant in improving the shared awareness of global and regional issues. Offering more proactive and wider opportunities for local and international students to collaborate on addressing pressing global issues (economic, social, technological, environmental) will reinforce the positive requirements for intercultural global learners and create more visibility for further such pathways after these experiences.

Q8. 3 - What changes are needed to make Australia more globally competitive over the next decade? [limit to 500 words]

Australia and its education systems will need to acknowledge and address several priorities over the next decade to ensure we remain competitive (and collaborative). Some of these have been mentioned already, but the role of additional languages for Australian students should be noted again. We cannot hope to project a welcoming and inclusive multicultural society if we shun our interest and ability to engage through the languages of our region – the same one that we rely on for growth in international education. Secondly, the heightened role of professional learning must be prioritized to accommodate these market and service shifts. New systems, tools, and approaches will need to be embedded in delivery. This means a much more coordinated and systematic effort is required in the professional learning of educators and trainers to provide world-class education. For example, CRICOS schools could be supported with teacher professional learning that enables a deepening of their understanding of intercultural learning and how they can better support international students. Similarly, encouraging projects that open the collaborative opportunities for Australian school leaders to work with peers and colleagues across the Indo-Pacific on key education reforms and issues, such as wellbeing, equity, ICT, or creativity, which foster even greater global engagement.

Q22. 3.1 - 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? [limit to 500 words]

Policy and regulatory flexibility are indeed important in enabling providers to innovate and stay competitive. However, it would be important for the Council to consider how current regulations, such as the Foreign Relations Amendments Bill (FRB), might hold many potential providers and partners back. There are thousands of schools around Australia that have been told (by State/Territory Departments) to suspend all sister-school and international engagements, while awaiting outcomes of the FRB. Along with the short-term disruption to travel, this has the potential to put many international engagements into a kind of 'deep freeze' that could take even longer to thaw out. The Council could consider key communications and requirements that support relations to continue and evolve without existing systems halting international engagements.

Q21.
4 - How can providers, governments and stakeholders work together to achieve diversification opportunities (for example of disciplines, source countries, study destinations and delivery models)? [limit to 500 words]

In short, data might be one of the most powerful solutions to understanding the scope and diversification of current and potential opportunities. Many State/Territory Departments do not even know the true extent of school partnerships and relationships internationally under their jurisdiction. They are often approaching organisations like AEF to know what international partnerships are happening. While data on the type and nature of the partnerships could be viewed with some scepticism, proposing a platform that rewards the sharing of engagement with an exchange of tactics and networks could be very powerful. In education networks are essential, but they are often viewed as part of competitive advantage. Fostering much greater consortium approaches to international education, across schools and tertiary fields for example, might create much more powerful pathways and services for providers and the students themselves. This could be especially important in the shared design of services, credentials, and community relationships. Digital systems and accompanying networks and sharing must be a priority over the next decade. Creating more consistent forums for key stakeholders to come together on these in the short-term might reveal the true extent of both capacity and willingness to realise such opportunities. Regarding the Council itself, perhaps greater representation from the school sector or even youth voice might ground the strategic initiatives further. This includes diversification in the market opportunities across the Indo-Pacific, which are each unique in how these might be approached. For example, the ways in which education services across Pacific nations are playing out. A contextual roadmap for the Indo-Pacific would communicate strongly how deeply we value our links with the region through international education.

Q9.
5 - What are the necessary skills for the future that students should be prepared for? [limit to 500 words]

It is a given across curriculum and education strategy pieces that all students must develop critical and creative thinking skills, digital capability, intercultural capability, ethical understanding, and personal wellbeing to thrive in our globalized and connected world. The recognition and credentialing of these skills are already on the horizon for many education systems. This allows students to provide the evidence of their experience and expertise and to carry it with them wherever they go. The Council should ensure they are well-informed on this progress within Australian education and acknowledge the great innovation potential for Australia in joining up insights and approaches on this. For example, Learning Creates Australia [<https://www.learningcreates.org.au/>] is working on this very agenda for renewed ways to recognise and scaffold learning pathways, as too are New Metrics for Success [<https://education.unimelb.edu.au/new-metrics-for-success>] through the Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

Q10.
5.1 - How can Australia improve employability outcomes for international students, ensuring students have the necessary the skills to compete in a globally competitive labour market? [limit to 500 words]

Opportunities for international students to develop these knowledge, skills, and networks, alongside their local peers, and improve their employability outcomes, could include: - Incentives for employers to offer internships for international students, with targeted support from education providers or governments - Entrepreneurship programs and competitions - Mentoring programs, including peer mentoring with local students - Dedicated programs during breaks/holidays that focus on maintaining stronger social connections and networks. - Youth forums bringing students of all walks together to elevate key issues of regional and global significance to enhance a sense of shared purpose.

Q11.
6 - How do we create a uniquely Australian education experience? [limit to 500 words]

To put it simply, a uniquely Australian education experience starts with greater knowledge and understanding of Australia's First Nations, and our connections to land, water, and sky. This goes hand-in-hand with intercultural learning being at the heart of the student experience. First Nations knowledge and storytelling is of great interest to those outside Australia keen to connect – it has not been prioritised enough as a uniquely Australian and intercultural context through which to build shared understanding. There is much that has already been developed, for example AITSL's 'Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce', that could inform responsive and constructive approaches on First Nations. This also serves a dual purpose for young Australians who are overseas as ambassadors for our cultural strengths and are called on to inform international colleagues about the role and heritage of First Nations.

Q12.
6.1 - What is our value proposition for both international and domestic students? [limit to 500 words]

Q13.
6.2 - How do we offer an Australian education experience while complementing the value of Australian offshore and online education? [limit to 500 words]

Q14.
7 - What else should the Council for International Education and the Australian Government consider in developing a new strategy? [limit to 500 words]

There is little doubt that international education, across the wide spectrum of the types of engagement, creates numerous lifelong friendships and relationships. Emphasis on the creative communication and empathy with these stories might be a missing element for the wider community. How might the Council approach key communities to help inform and communicate the value of international education? These could come through jurisdictions, existing committees, and city councils, or as part of major events. Engaging with an array of youth dialogue groups supporting intercultural exchange, existing New Colombo Plan (NCP) alumni, or school networks focussed on the International Baccalaureate (IB), Duke of Edinburgh Award, or even Rotary Club channels creates more grassroots awareness and empathy – as well as opportunities for existing international students to be heard, valued, and given the space to be commended for their efforts in education.

Q15.
8 - Do you have any additional comments or feedback to share?

There are some potentially strong international development and human development opportunities that a more linked and aware strategy could promote. Such as ways in which teacher workforce challenges and benefits could be created between Australia and some key neighbours in the region. For example, fostering special programs to allow Indonesian teachers to develop experience in Australia by also teaching Bahasa Indonesia – in collaboration with key Australian agencies such as AITSL. The Council should recognise other significant Government initiatives that contribute to Australian education, notably Pacific Step-Up. It is one of Australia's highest foreign policy priorities, Step-up responds to and recognises the broad-ranging challenges of our region, identified by Pacific leaders and communities themselves, including: strengthening climate and disaster resilience; sustained economic growth; and support to promote healthy, educated, inclusive populations. Departments of Education and schools widely promote the academic and personal benefits for international students studying in Australian schools. However, in most cases, international students are not necessarily seen as an asset to a school's broader learning experience. There is little practical advice for Australian primary and secondary schools on how to best integrate international students across their community and the learning opportunities this brings to the whole school community. The Consultation paper mentions that "the Strategy could recognise the benefits to Australia's soft diplomacy that comes from international education, where exchanges between students can support and expand regional and global influence. A new Strategy could explore ways to maximise this alignment." At a minimum, the word change at the beginning needs to say "the Strategy should recognise the benefits...", as it is through the genuine intention of these national documents that awareness and groundwork begin to shift. The role of soft diplomacy should be self-evident and a much bigger emphasis in the long tail of international education. The Consultation paper also identifies "the opportunities to learn valuable intercultural skills which help prepare our graduates for a globalised workforce" – it is this kind of language that needs to be highlighted. Again, the nature of a 'globalised workforce' could be helped by some current and potential scenarios. This could link well with the outlined notion of 'Connecting communities', which presents a powerful opportunity to begin building the kind of digital network infrastructure/platforms to allow alumni networks, school partnerships, provider types, and international engagement spectrums to be detailed – bringing to the surface the often-invisible scale of existing international connections and the incredible impact and formats these take.

Q19.

If you wish to upload a document to support your submission, including a document answering the discussion questions, please upload it here.

Q16.

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