

11 May 2021

Department of Education, Skills and Employment  
GPO Box 9880, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Re: Personal submission regarding the *Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030* consultation paper**

My name is Yu Tao. I am a senior lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Western Australia (UWA), where I coordinate the Chinese Studies major and teach contemporary Chinese society and language. At UWA, I teach, on average, 200 to 300 international students each year and have been researching the experience of Chinese international students in Australia, especially amid the COVID-19 pandemic. I am a council member of both the Australian Asian Studies Association and the Australian Chinese Studies Association. These experiences have provided me ample opportunities to observe, analyse, and reflect on the international education practice in contemporary Australia. This submission, however, reflects my personal views rather than those of the institutions with which I work.

Over the last several weeks, I have provided my views at a few events organised by various academic and professional entities to discuss the consultation paper. This personal submission will focus on two questions listed at the end of the consultation paper.

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

Before COVID, international students – especially those from major sending countries such as China and India – were highly visible on many Australian campuses. It is my impression that Australian universities understand the needs for active academic and pastoral support to international students. However, to further enhance the study experience of international students in Australia and take further advantages of them as bridges between Australia and the sending countries, more attention and support should be invested to engage international students **before** and **after** their study in Australia. It is inadequate to rely on Australian universities exclusively to achieve so. As the main stakeholders and direct beneficiaries of international students, Australian universities may well have the intention and incentive to engage international students before and after their study. Some universities have been doing wonderful things, albeit at a limited scale and with moderate impacts. However, individual universities often do not have the necessary resource and structure to implement these engagement activities. The Australian Government should proactively invest its resource and expertise to narrow or bridge the gap.

**Recommendation 1:** *Organise national events or projects for international students before they come to Australia. Provide resources and opportunities for international students who spend holidays in their home countries to engage with prospective international students.*

People to people engagements involved in and focus on international students should be given a higher priority. The Australian Government should provide resources and opportunities for nationally branded events and projects for international students **before** their commencement of studying in Australia. These events and projects will help the incoming international students better prepare for their upcoming journeys and set their expectation right. My own experience with supporting Chinese international students suggest that students usually are more empowered, energetic, and enthusiastic when they get their perceptions of their upcoming study and life in Australia right. They are generally better positioned to take on the challenges if they expect that there will be cultural and other differences between Australia and their home country. They generally take better ownership of study

and life in Australia when they are explicitly informed of the common challenges and the values from taking on these challenges. Current international students in their home country for holidays should be encouraged to organise and run these events. They often understand the needs of the prospective international students and hence are often the best ambassadors for the education provided by Australia.

***Recommendation 2: Provide various forms of capital to support establishing and maintaining an active nationally branded alumni network.***

Supports (in terms of financial, social, and cultural capital) should be provided to establish a network of alumni of Australia's international education. The Australian Government may consider running regular events such as receptions or networking activities to sustain the link that the alumni have with Australia, either directly or in partnership with Australian universities, diplomatic missions, and not-for-profit organisations. It will be helpful if the Australian Government could allocate funding and other supports to create a nationally branded alumni network in addition to those that have been established and maintained by individual education providers. Although individual education providers may have the incentive to engage with their alumni anyway, the nationally branded alumni network will undoubtedly achieve higher social and cultural impacts. The events and projects carried out by the nationally branded alumni network can also be marketed more efficiently.

***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 the wider community?***

Australia is often regarded as one of the most successful multicultural nations globally, and multiculturalism is one of the finest achievements of Australian society since the 1970s. To win over the support from the broader community to Australia's international education requires a genuine embracement of multiculturalism. In particular, it is necessary to break down the 'utilitarian discourse', which is predominately popular among many policymakers and practitioners in Australia's international education sector.

***Recommendation 3: Shift the narrative on the benefits of international education from emphasising the utilitarian gains to highlighting the implications to Australia's multiculturalism.***

The 'utilitarian discourse' argues that international education is necessary for Australia because it brings in money and creates jobs. It may go further by arguing that international students bring human capital to accelerate Australia's creativity and innovations. I agree with the substance of the utilitarian statement. However, no matter how sophisticated or sensible the 'utilitarian discourse' is, the moment we consider international education as tools for utilitarian benefits, we regard international students as a body of people outside, rather than a part of, the Australian society. International students may thus be othered by the Australian society. Instead, to win over the support from the broader community to Australia's international education in the long term, the sector must shift its narrative on the benefits of international education. In particular, efforts should be made to explicitly highlight how international students enhance and enrich Australia's proud multiculturalism.

I hope some of my views and recommendations are relevant and useful for further developing the Australian Strategy for International Education. I am happy to provide further explanations or elaborations if needed, and I can be reached through the contact information listed at the bottom of the first page.

Yours faithfully,

