

Q20.

Australian Strategy for International Education consultation submission

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Q1. Name *

Robert Parsonson

Q2. Organisation *

ISEAA - INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION AGENTS ASSOCIATION LIMITED

Q3. Occupation/role at the organisation (if applicable)

Executive Officer

Q4. Contact email address *

Q5. Contact phone number

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

Employability is now the key word for students. The real issue is how can the study-abroad investment returns be measured against 'can this study help me secure a career in my home country, Australia or elsewhere in the world?'. Universities who charge the highest fees, should be implementing scalable employability programs to ensure there is an amount of work-based learning such as a 3-month internship or co-op built into every degree as a minimum (as US and European universities all do). Students would like to be involved in the communities they are living and studying in – many students would like to volunteer with the right organisation. An excellent example is the Kindness Shake group in the NT. This group came from Covid-19 peer-to-peer support from NT students and is now a registered charity with many different community activities. This kind of initiative gives real experiences to students that will assist them all their life and make the study abroad experience worthwhile. Students and their parents need to know that they will be safe in Australia. This means more work to ensure that students are protected from wage and working conditions exploitation and ensuring employers are prosecuted when found to be underpaying or poorly treating students. Students also need active consumer protection for accommodation and awareness of their rights under legislation. Further support for mental health, safety and security are all part of the value of coming to Australia. Mental health services must be covered within the OSHC premiums. A more welcoming pre-departure briefing and arrival would make a great difference to the student experience. Thought needs to include plans on how to take care of students and temporary visa holders should another lockdown situation occur. Temporary residents are part of our community and are considered 'residents for tax purposes' – there must be provision to assist all members of the community if they are unable to make their way home. Canada has done this exceptionally well during COVID by treating students the same as Canadian citizens and permanent residents with regards welfare support during lockdown. In Australia, education agents continue to provide support by offering student welfare services in these areas. This work has been unpaid and unacknowledged and is vital in assisting students before, during and after studies in Australia. Rebuilding Australia's reputation as a reliable study abroad destination: Australia has taken reputational damage during the COVID-19 pandemic with poor messaging and on-going communications lacking any continuity for stranded and other visa holders. The focus on new modalities of education delivery being online and offshore is not new. Diversity of student source markets – a major issue pre-COVID-19. The large dependence on the Chinese student market by the large higher education institutes was not reflected in the ELICOS, VET and private HE providers. There is appeal for many students around the world to come to Australia. To counter these arguments is the fact that all international education countries rely on China and India as the major source markets Supporting education agents from diverse markets: In university student recruitment the regional agent model lead to a vast sub-agent network being generated in China and South Asia – more diversity and numbers in markets other than China and the sub-continent could be attracted by opening more agency contracts to education agents in smaller markets. Assisting Australian companies to become an edutech hub: Australia already has a strong reputation as an edutech country. Double down on investment, research and development, and incentives to house and develop edutech solutions and assist Australian providers to incorporate technical solutions to provide attractive synchronous and asynchronous delivery of programs to offshore students

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]

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

The first step will be rebuilding trust in Australian education – enhancing the student offer and post study work rights will quickly move Australia back into attracting students. 1. Abandon some of the Genuine Temporary Entrant (GTE) criteria and fold these into Genuine Student questions. The division of study and migration is a false dichotomy as many students may or may not want to migrate after study, but all are treated with suspicion throughout the questioning and interview. Australia has legal work rights while studying and post study work rights (PSWR) options for many students that should preclude any GTE criteria. 2. Increase work hours during study – the current 40 hours per fortnight should be increased to 50 hours. This would allow employers to give 3 X 8-Hour shifts to students each week. For the hospitality and other industries this would help alleviate some of the current skills shortages and give students the chance to earn their living costs without taking on 'cash in hand' jobs vulnerable to wage exploitation. This enhances the attraction of the Australian study offer.

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]

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]

There are growing numbers of providers looking at programs that start overseas as an online product or partner institution face to face teaching and finish the program onshore in Australia. This will be a growing trend to de-risk the business due to border closures and allowing students to keep engaged with the Australian provider. In terms of study abroad there is no way to match the immersive experience of travelling and living in another country. There is growth in online courses as lockdown offers no other option. As any parent stuck with children in lockdown will tell you students prefer to be with other students. It is a totally different for those who choose online such as the working professional who likes the flexibility of asynchronous online delivery to be able to fit in with a work schedule or travelling. Australian must focus much more heavily on ASEAN countries and Indonesia in particular. There are many opportunities with the new free trade agreement for effective partnerships. ASEAN countries are our true neighbours with a growing demographic of younger students that will need education and skills training.

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

The employability outcomes for international students – ‘exit with equity’ is the new term. What are the experiences that students can leave with that may impress a future employer? Many Australian universities have been very slow in offering work-based learning to their students. It was convenient and extremely cost efficient to teach large classes and tutorials – to assist students find 3-month work placements as part of their assessable study is labour intensive and difficult.

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]

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

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

i. The value proposition for international students is having the tourism and study experience of studying, travelling and working in Australia. A unique destination that attracts many thousands of tourists as well as friends and relatives of students to come and experience the country. Of course, students want a quality education and a recognised degree + work experience that will assist them to find employment either in Australia or in other countries. Part of the value proposition is international students can work while study in all sectors of education combined with the opportunity of getting post study work rights. The value proposition to Australian students would be getting them back on campus as soon as possible and building better communities of students during their time at universities. Lack of funding for clubs and societies while pouring international student fees directly into research shows contempt for the Australia undergraduates. Events that are not alcohol driven would encourage more international students to mix and interact with Australian students.

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]

ii. This sounds like a 'nice to have' topic that has no meaning – there is no way to offer a uniquely Australian education experience to offshore and online students. If a student does a Harvard online course, they are not expecting a uniquely USA experience, they are after a recognisable and trusted credential to add to their resume. Most students currently doing online study are doing so as a pathway to getting onshore as soon as possible and earn enough time to qualify for post study work rights.

Q14.

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

Unfortunately, the general lack of community support for international students is still largely a result of negative media stories that are sensational and misrepresent the value and importance of international education for Australia's futures. While this is slowly changed in Australia, much more needs to be done and this should be a major focus of the state and federal government agencies that oversee the sector. Australia has been built by migrants through all its history and students are now an integral part of this narrative. So many businesses and employment opportunities have been built by ex-international students or depend upon them to supply the workforce not filled by Australians. Students provide a pool of labour that has assisted the growth of the Australian economy and contributed to the multi-cultural make up that is Australia today. Highlighting student journeys and contributions is the key to building trust that sector is not just bringing the 'cash-cows'. Genuine building of diversity in student cohorts will slow down the anxiety of Australian students sitting in classes of a majority single nationality.

Q15.

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

ISEAA Board member David Riordan has led the re-formation of the industry roundtable of peak bodies in education to bring an industry-led recovery plan of international education. This initiative should be formalised and work at further cooperation between sectors. ISEAA also recommends that an education agent be appointed to the Council for International Education – education agents are recognised by government as a continuing important bridge between the student and the education provider.

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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- Yes – publish my submission with my name
- Yes – but keep my name anonymous

No – don't publish my submission