

Q20.

Australian Strategy for International Education consultation submission

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Dr Patrick Pheasant

Q2. Organisation *

NEAS Australia

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

Chief Executive Officer

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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]

NEAS Australia congratulates the Department of Education Skills, and Employment (DESE) on the consultation paper 'Connected, Creative, Caring: Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030' and welcomes the opportunity to provide a response on behalf of NEAS Australia members. This is an incredibly important document released at the most difficult time the International Education Industry has ever experienced and it bravely attempts to make projections and predictions for the future against a backdrop of incredible uncertainty. The Consultation Paper recognises the contribution international students have made to our nation. It identifies the four key roles: 1. Advances Australia's Economy and Society 2. Enriches the experience of Australian students. 3. Meets the future skills needs in Australia and overseas. 4. Builds strong links and soft power connections to Australia. Given the current environment it is essential that benefits to Australia from the industry are seen as multi-faceted not just focused on economic returns. NEAS Australia believes it is the quality of the student experience that is the key priority for a new strategy. Quality assurance and standards development is the core business of NEAS and this issue consistently rates highly in satisfaction surveys of International Students. The post COVID world for International Education will rely heavily on on-line delivery and the quality of this learning experience will be critical to the future of the international education industry in Australia. The biggest risk to Australia's reputation internationally as a quality education provider could lay in those areas that are not regulated by ASQA or TEQSA, for example, short term courses, offshore programs, courses for migrants and refugees, non-award programs, work readiness programs, internships, and test providers. The Consultation Paper suggests 'the Strategy is an opportunity to explore innovative ways Australia can expand its footprint including digital delivery, blended learning, micro-credentials, stackable short courses and more, while maintaining our academic standards and reputation' and further references the importance of 'setting the standard and how the Strategy could look at how to ensure quality is maintained, regardless of where international students are'. However, the Consultation Paper fails to identify any concrete suggestions as to how quality could be monitored and regulated in a post COVID world. Government needs to recognise that 'regulatory limitations' present great risks to the Australian International Education Industry in the future. Recommendation I: Government needs to develop a stronger regulatory framework for a POST-COVID world. Organisations like NEAS Australia, who is regarded as a global leader in quality assurance, should be at the forefront of the development of such a POST-COVID regulatory framework.

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]

The International Education Industry is a large and dynamic one and not just the domain of Universities. Students studying in all sectors should be at the centre of how those businesses operate. This should not be seen as a new concept. A high-quality student experience is critical to the industry's standing in the world. Consultation with students has improved enormously over the years and DESE needs to be congratulated for ensuring the President Council of International Student Australia (CISA) is a member of the International Education Council (IEC). There is no doubt that there are well known complexities associated with how a student may assess their own satisfaction. Government and regulators need to ensure student satisfaction is front and centre of the regulatory frameworks, but this should never come at the expense of quality. Providers should never lower academic standards to influence student satisfaction. In the past Australia's reputation as a quality provider of international education in the VET Sector suffered enormously. There were many issues at play that resulted in this perception of loss of quality however partially there was a regulatory failure at both a state and federal level. A POST-COVID world will be a vastly different environment for education providers who want to operate internationally. There will be increased competition, a slow return of students, possibly fewer students and students who want to study in a vastly different way. This could all provide an opportunity for quality to become compromised in the interests of economic gains. Recommendation II: Government needs to allocate further support and funding into the development of quality and standards and innovative regulation for all products and services including agents, teaching, and learning products and teaching professionals. This could be through contracting or deeds of authority with organisations such as NEAS. A student-centred approach necessitates professionals to have skills to engage with modern learners. Qualified "ELT professionals" encompass not just the teacher, but all other support, administration and support staff to ensure a customised learner experience in ELICOS and by extension the larger English language teaching community. Australian providers having ongoing access to qualified and experienced staff is essential to meet this outcome. To avoid "brain drain" of ELT professionals, the industry must provide career pathways and demonstrate our commitment to their development by supporting organisations that provide teacher qualification accreditation, professional development and professional services to English language teachers, such as NEAS. Recommendation III: Invite NEAS to relevant roundtables and committees to represent ELT professionals.

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

In recent decades in order to achieve the status of a Global Leader, Australia has done an excellent job marketing itself as a safe, welcoming country with a quality student experience. Even before COVID-19, the industry was beginning to feel the winds of change with the number of international students beginning to drop in some sectors. Political power has been shifting from west to east over recent years and the concept of globalisation has begun to change. Nation states have had to focus on themselves and there may be a greater need for them to keep their best and brightest students at home rather than send them off to study overseas. In 2021, as the COVID 19 pandemic continues, it is clear that our global competitors in the International Education space like Canada, the UK and the US are using this crisis as an opportunity to reboot their ailing industries. The early opening of their borders and offering migration outcomes to potential students have been two of the most successful tools resulting in attracting more international students into their institutions. Despite the change in the geo-political state of the world, recent data from Education Agents particularly in South America indicate an increase in the number of young people eager to leave their homelands. This is not only because of COVID but also the corresponding economic and political fallout from the pandemic. The link between migration and education has been a vexed issue for some time. Australia currently has zero net migration, and all indications are that it will be years before we return to pre-COVID migration figures, if ever. Recommendation IV: It is time for a migration outcome to be considered for international students with Australian Qualifications. The current Skills Commission should be the starting point for the conversation about the link between education and migration. Research into Global and Australian Skills needs post-COVID should be conducted by DESE in 2021. All migration outcomes for international students should be linked to current and future skills needs. Quality standards in all areas of the English language teaching community should be explored and benchmarked against standards in other countries (NEAS does this annually as part of its membership requirements for QALLEN www.qalen.org).

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]

The regulators ASQA and TEQSA are to be commended for their flexibility during COVID with fees and regulatory activity. This pause has allowed providers to innovate. Recommendation V: It is recommended that periods of pause on regulation be purposeful and systematically planned in the future to allow for further innovation. Regulators should engage consistently and sincerely with organisations who represent all stakeholders of the international education and training sector, including providers and business owners but also teachers, students, test providers, accommodation and homestay providers, education agents, parents, offshore partners and pathway providers. Peak bodies do not necessarily represent all of these stakeholders and by limiting engagement with only (self-defined) peak bodies, regulators and government are failing to consult all members in the community. Recommendation VI: DESE should more proactively engage with organisations who represent stakeholders in the community and not limit consultation to peak bodies only.

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]

The international education industry is a large and diverse one and at times it is fractured. The Consultation Paper sets out the diversity of the industry by including 'an array of auxiliary industries' including: a. Accommodation, b. Tourism c. Health d. Research e. Retail f. Hospitality With Quality Assurance being critical to Australia's reputation globally, Quality Assurance agencies like NEAS should also be included as an auxiliary industry. During COVID there has been a clear attempt by the industry to work together. The 'industry' recognises there will always be inherent conflicts between public and private, education providers and auxiliary industries. However, there needs to be a thorough attempt to have a more cohesive industry that can work together and speak with one voice. Diversification of products, source countries, delivery modes etc are in many cases decisions made by individual businesses. These decisions are made based on the analysis of sound data and evidence. Recommendation VII: Government has a responsibility to ensure that sound real time national and international data is made available to all within the industry so appropriate business decisions can be made. Recommendation VIII: Formalise an Industry led body e.g., Industry Roundtable. Recommendation IX: Create an Agency e.g., International Education Commission modelled on the Skills Commission which bring Government agencies together with the Industry Roundtable. These two bodies should be consulted prior to any government or policy or announcements, for example, the shock announcement of changes to the 408 visas on 7 May 2021.

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

Despite the uncertainties of the Post -COVID world which will include major shifts in the geo-political order of the world and some major changes to the concept of globalisation there is no question the demand for quality English language will increase as English will continue to be the predominant language of choice internationally. In a highly competitive post-COVID global market, students will make their decision where to study and what to study based on several indicators including cost, the quality of the student experience and a welcoming community. One key factor will be the opportunity to gain experience with industry while studying. This could include internships, industry-based learning, post study work rights and even volunteering. These experiences will enhance the student's employability post-graduation. Employability skills are critical for the graduation outcomes of international students. Many of these students would be a great asset to industry particularly industries that have a global presence. There are several issues international students face when accessing Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programs: a. Visa issues b. Discrimination c. English language barriers d. Industry reticence to become involved. Recommendation X: Support and funding to build the professionalism of the English Language Teaching community with the International Education and Training sector by development of standards, recognition, and ongoing professional development of English Language teachers. Funding and support should be made available for the creation of a Professional Association for English Language teachers. NEAS Australia has already set standards for English language teaching professionals <https://neas.org.au/quality-elt-professionals/> , but this could be further funded. The IEC should set Work Integrated Learning (WIL) as a priority for this strategy and identify what steps can be taken to remove the barriers identified, particularly visa issues, and industry reticence to become involved in WIL programs. The IEC and Industry Roundtable should have industry representatives as full members.

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]

International education relies heavily on the support of the wider community to provide a welcoming and positive environment to all our guests. For many decades, the International Education industry has worked hard to garnish the support of the wider community. However, unlike other major industries the average Australian was unaware of the importance of the International Education industry to Australia. The industry has learnt to not rely on the economic narrative to gain community support. The creation of the IEC was a major step forward in gaining support from Government and having six Federal Cabinet Ministers on the Committee is a huge step forward and represents one of the only countries in the world with such a body. Recommendation XI: Champions of International Education are required. These need to be respected members of the community and well know nationally. They could be well informed state and federal senior politicians like State Premiers, Ministers etc. or household names who could advocate on behalf of the industry across all forms of media. Recommendation XII: Funding should be made available for PR Campaigns with nationally agreed and consistent messaging to be run by all key stakeholders and Peak Bodies to inform their constituents, stakeholders, and partners. Recommendation XIII: Study Groups nationally should be encouraged to include community members and unions on their Boards.

Q11.

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

The Consultation Paper suggest that this strategy will guide the international education industry over the next decade. The Consultation Paper paper suggest the vision for a uniquely Australian education experience as follows: 'Australian education is trusted for its ingenuity, drive to find solutions and focus on collaboration, talent and expertise. Australian graduates are characterised by a willingness to share ideas and think critically. The Australian education eco-system is built on unrivalled government and private sector collaboration, driving continuous improvement in quality assurance, employability outcomes and student protections. At the heart of our education and training system is our engagement with industry. As the most successful multicultural society in the world, we lead in intercultural competencies and understanding. These attributes prepare our graduates to work anywhere in the world'. Recommendation XIV: In order to achieve 'unrivalled government and private sector collaboration' key industry stakeholders and industry bodies should be represented on the IEC and the proposed Industry Roundtable (not just peak bodies). Government needs to allocate further support and funding into the further development of quality and standards and innovative regulation for all products and services including agents, teaching, and learning products and teaching professionals. The IEC should set Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and sound engagement with industry as a priority for this strategy and identify what can steps can be taken to remove barriers to successful partnerships with industry.

Q12.

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

Recent efforts by the State and Territory study agencies in acting as one voice for the Study With Australia campaign is to be commended. This has moved the emphasis from Australia as the first and final destination to exploring how prospective students can be engaged earlier in their study lifecycles and in different modes of study. Partnership and business development with partners in source countries can provide Australian providers with opportunities to provide services to students at more points in their study journey. Recommendation XV: Organisations that export education such as NEAS and operate in Australia and in Australia's source counties could be leveraged to increase the value proposition for international students, provide more services at more touch points in their journeys. These relationships can then be utilised to build study abroad opportunities for domestic students, building the capabilities of domestic students to operate in the global workforce of the future.

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]

The Australian English language teaching community with the support of the government and regulators needs to spotlight and showcase the innovation and quality student experience that is occurring outside of regulated areas, such as online delivery of English language teaching and offshore delivery of language and university pathways. NEAS' recent work in quality assurance and standards development for ELICOS / ELT in Online Delivery and the adoption of such standards by more than 20 ELICOS providers is just the tip of the iceberg with online and offshore delivery of a high quality and transformative educational experience for international students destined to study in Australia . Recommendation XVI: It is recommended that there be future inclusion in councils / discussions and debates with the sector of organisations such as NEAS that represent large segments of the ELICOS and English Language Teaching in Australia but have previous been excluded from discussions because they don't define themselves as a peak body (for example, NEAS represents 186 centres over 108 organisations of which 50 Australian providers of ELICOS are not represented by peak bodies such as English Australia, IEAA, or ITECA. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the Council for International Education could be more proactively engaging with and utilizing organizations such as NEAS which focus on quality and standards for members, especially for parts of the sector that are not regulated by ASQA or TEQSA (short term courses, online courses, offshore programs, courses for migrants and refugees, non-award programs, work readiness programs, internships and test providers). Investment could be made into organisations which operate both domestically and internationally to enhance global education, recognition of Australian quality education, business development and partnerships with source countries for international students (as opposed to competition). There could be more support and funding into development of quality and standards for the allied products and services to international education and training such as support for quality education agents, products and services and ELT professionals. Furthermore, support and funding should be made to build the professionalism of the English Language Teaching community with the International Education and Training sector by development of standards, recognition and ongoing professional development of English Language teachers.

Q14.

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

The CIE should be congratulated on the work they have done in the development of this Consultation Paper. The CIE plays a key role the development of the Strategy but will in future play an increasingly strategic role in the implementation of the Strategy. Listed below are a number of recommendations for the Council in developing and implementing the Strategy. Recommendation XVII: It is time to review the membership of the IEC. Membership should be broadened to include more of key stakeholders like NEAS Australia. NEAS represent large segments of the ELICOS and English Language Teaching sectors in Australia. NEAS represents 186 centres over 108 organisations of which 50 Australian providers of ELICOS are not represented by peak bodies such as English Australia, IEAA, or ITECA. In addition, organisations like NEAS have an unrivalled global reputation and are taking a leading role internationally in the quality assurance of online education. The Purpose-Built Student Accommodation Peak body SAA should also be a member of the IEC. The council should recommend to government to increase investment into organisations which operate both domestically and internationally to enhance global education, recognition of Australian quality education, business development and partnerships with source countries for international students.

Q15.

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

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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