

Expert Members of the Council for International Education  
Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment  
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## **Connected, Creative, Caring: Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030 – Study NSW Submission**

Dear Expert Members of the Council for International Education (the Council)

Study NSW welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Council's consultation paper setting out the proposed national vision, goals, and immediate priorities for the international education sector over the next decade. Study NSW has consulted the NSW Department of Education in making this submission.

### **NSW strongly values international education and its benefit to our communities**

International education is identified as a priority sector under the NSW Government's Global NSW Strategy,<sup>1</sup> and is one of five main pillars to the NSW Higher Education Strategy 2021-2025,<sup>2</sup> which provides a commitment to position NSW globally by reinvigorating and diversifying international education and engagement.

The Government strongly supports the state's international education sector through Study NSW, which was established in July 2014. Since its inception, Study NSW has actively advanced the interests of international students and the sector, helping to enhance the experience, and grow the number, of international students studying in the state.

In 2019, NSW was home to almost 287,000 international students,<sup>3</sup> with international education contributing over \$14.6 billion to the NSW economy<sup>4</sup> and supporting over 95,000 full-time equivalent jobs.<sup>5</sup>

Our international students create many cultural and social benefits to the NSW communities in which they live, study and work, helping connect our cities and regions to the world. The benefits of these connections extend beyond graduation, as our international student alumni return to their home country and foster continued international research, trade, and diplomatic links.

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<sup>1</sup> Global NSW Strategy, [link](#)

<sup>2</sup> NSW Department of Education, Higher education and tertiary policy, NSW Higher Education Strategy 2021-25, [link](#)

<sup>3</sup> 'Student numbers', Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment Data Visualisations, [link](#)

<sup>4</sup> 'International Trade: Supplementary Information, Calendar Year', Reference period 2019, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table 3. International trade in services, credits, state by calendar year, \$m, [link](#)

<sup>5</sup> 'Jobs supported by international students studying in Australia', Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment Research Snapshot, March 2019, [link](#)

## NSW is investing significantly in international education

In November 2020, the NSW Government more than doubled its budget commitment for Study NSW, committing at least \$18.2 million over four years to the unit. This commitment is supplemented by over \$250 million in additional funding for trade and industry, including over \$112 million to double the NSW's international network to 21 offices and establish education-focused roles offshore dedicated to supporting the sector's recovery.<sup>6</sup>

Study NSW is growing its personnel to enhance our promotion and marketing of NSW as a first-choice destination for education and work experience, and to deliver a positive international student experience, both onshore and offshore. Study NSW is helping to create an ecosystem where international education can continue to flourish into the future, including by fostering articulation pathways (from school through to tertiary study), strengthening student employability and links to industry both during and post studies, and supporting our growing EdTech sector. This is further amplified by the NSW Government's broader investment in Lighthouse Precincts, globally significant precincts in technology, healthcare, logistics and aerospace, anchored by universities, research institutions and innovation businesses.<sup>7</sup>

Collaboration is key, which is why Study NSW is increasing its investment in our successful Partner Projects program, supporting co-funded projects to benefit international education delivered in partnership with industry. Between 2014 and 2020, Study NSW has invested \$2.1 million across 53 partner projects and attracted \$7.9 million in industry contributions. Additional funding and a focus on digital solutions, student wellbeing on and offshore, employability and regional NSW will ensure Study NSW Partner Projects maximise impact, support COVID-19 recovery efforts and see the benefits of the sector shared across NSW.

We expect there to be ongoing demand for onshore face-to-face teaching<sup>8</sup> and Australia needs to be poised to take advantage of this through a clear strategy to recapture market share, while also taking advantage of new online avenues accelerated by the pandemic.

## Australia must be ambitious in its vision for international education

Considering the many benefits brought by the sector and increasing global competition for international students, Australia needs to be ambitious in its vision for international education; and ensure this vision is backed by globally competitive visa settings<sup>9</sup>.

The Council is right to place students at the centre of the strategy. This should include a clear commitment to facilitating their safe return as soon as possible. NSW has been a strong advocate for getting the sector up and running again via a sensible, safe quarantine plan. As recently noted by the NSW Treasurer, The Hon. Dominic Perrottet MP, "If Australia is to ensure it has a long-term future beyond being an exporter of resources and agricultural products, we must act now to restart and reinforce our struggling service export industries, particularly international education".<sup>10</sup> With international student choices and motivations increasingly driven by the availability of face-to-face study, this should be an immediate priority for the Commonwealth.

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<sup>6</sup> NSW Government, Media Release, 'Record Investment in Trade and Industry', 12 November 2020, [link](#)

<sup>7</sup> Global NSW, Connected, Smart, Vibrant, Brochure, [link](#)

<sup>8</sup> IDP Research, 'International student choices and motivations increasingly driven by the availability of face-to-face teaching', 18 November 2020, [link](#)

<sup>9</sup> 'Canada: International students can complete studies online and still be eligible for post-study work permit', ICEF Monitor, 17 February 2021, [link](#)

<sup>10</sup> 'We must find a path to Australia for international students', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 19, 2021, [link](#)

The strategy must also acknowledge and support international students affected by the pandemic. International students, both on and offshore, have been significantly impacted by the pandemic. In Australia, international students lost their source of income, were ineligible for most government welfare support and experienced especially high levels of anxiety, amplified by isolation and incidents of racism.<sup>11</sup> Study NSW and other state and territory study clusters have stepped up efforts during the pandemic to support international student welfare. In May 2020, for example, the NSW Government announced more than \$20 million in international student welfare support, headlined by a temporary crisis accommodation scheme for students at risk of becoming homeless.<sup>12</sup> The accommodation scheme has helped nearly 6,400 international students and their dependents in their time of greatest need.

We encourage the Commonwealth Government to invest and leverage resources at its disposal to support international students' wellbeing, including through flexibility regarding work rights. For example, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) experience should not count towards international students' fortnightly 40-hour limits.

A national strategy is a critical platform, not only for providing a framework for recovery and growth, but for sending a clear message to current and prospective students about the nation's continued commitment to them. It is therefore pleasing to see the themes of 'Connected' and 'Caring' elevated to the strategy's title. Messaging from senior Commonwealth stakeholders carries significant weight and it's important that this messaging be positive.

### **A prosperous international education community comes from facilitating diverse and deeper connections**

Facilitating meaningful connections between international students and local communities and businesses has formed a central role in Study NSW's efforts to enhance the student experience in the state, and we strongly agree that it be a strategic priority of a national strategy.

Equally, achieving greater positive sentiment towards international education in Australia, including enhanced understanding of the benefits of international education to regional and local communities, should be an associated measure of success, along with improved employability outcomes for international students in Australia and overseas.

Study NSW is also very supportive of any efforts to build and enhance connections with offshore alumni networks. Collecting and sharing case studies of successful international student alumni to act as brand ambassadors for Australia, and co-organising of offshore events where we can connect with alumni, would be mutually beneficial.

Study NSW agrees that there is a clear role for government in supporting diversification. Diversity is important to the ongoing sustainability of the sector, and as noted in the consultation paper, could be measured by diversification of courses, partner countries, market segments and modes of delivery. It could also be measured by achieving greater success in diversification of study destinations within Australia, by continued encouragement for students to consider regional course offerings. A greater geographical spread of international students into regional and remote Australia would help to economically diversify these economies and reduce population pressure on major cities.

Study NSW is committed to supporting diversity, via the targeted deployment of specialist education roles as we grow our offshore footprint, by enhancing our marketing and promotion of our many

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<sup>11</sup> Morris, A., Hastings, C., Wilson, S., Mitchell, E., Ramia, G. and Overgaard, C. (2020). The experience of international students before and during COVID-19: Housing, work, study and wellbeing. Sydney: University of Technology Sydney.

<sup>12</sup> NSW Government, 'NSW Government supporting international students through COVID-19', 15 May 2020, [link](#)

unique NSW study destinations, and by supporting the continued growth of our nation leading EdTech sector, by organising pitch events and supporting trade missions to promote and connect NSW EdTech with local education providers, investors, and partners.

### **Australia's education data collection, analysis and market intelligence are world leading**

With international education data collected at the national level, Study NSW appreciates and benefits from the Commonwealth's world leading analysis. Study NSW encourages the Commonwealth's continued investment in data collection and dissemination to be captured under the strategy. Recent NSW sector consultations have identified a desire for greater access to data and market intelligence. Study NSW recommends Australian education and training providers be granted free access to the Austrade Market Information Package<sup>13</sup> to support the sector's recovery.

Study NSW invites the Australian Government to continue to consult closely with education providers, industry and government on the development and delivery of the new strategy for international education. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Australian Government and other state and territories under the 'Commonwealth State and Territory International Education and Training Forum', the Austrade 'Study Australia Partnership', and other such working groups, to facilitate an aligned strategy, investment and commitment to international education.

Yours sincerely



**Mr Peter Mackey**  
**Director, Education Sector Engagement**

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<sup>13</sup> 'Eligibility and fees', Austrade Market Information Package, [link](#)