

# Connected, Creative, Caring: Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030

Department of Education, Skills and  
Employment

## The Gordon Institute of TAFE Consultation Paper Response

12 May 2021



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## Vision for 2030 – International Education Strategy

### Discussion Questions – The Gordon Response

#### 1. Key Priorities

##### What are the key priorities for a new Australian Strategy for international education?

The Gordon is one of the oldest and largest regional TAFES in Victoria and has long held an integral role in the education and training of international students in both onshore and offshore delivery. No event in The Gordon's 100-year history of international education has had such a significant impact on student intakes than COVID-19, highlighting the need to develop new and innovative strategies for boosting international student numbers in the post pandemic world. There are several key priorities identified by The Gordon that are aimed at attracting students to Australia, particularly regional areas, once borders re-open.

These key priorities include:

**Increasing the number of scholarships for regional areas** - This will encourage and support international students to consider studying and living outside major cities and experience the benefits of a regional lifestyle.

**Improving Visa process for regional areas** - A more transparent and clearer visa program will benefit both student and education provider. For example, remove the genuine temporary entrant (GTE) requirements so the student visa application is assessed on the 'willingness' to study but not the intention of their post-study plans.

**Prestige positioning of Australian International education to the world** - Australia has a major focus on promoting its 'lifestyle' to the world whereas UK, USA and Canada for example, are recognised as prestigious and world class education and study destinations. Increasing promotion of Australia as a premier education destination is needed if we are to be a major global competitor.

**Educating local communities** - Increasing public awareness about the value that international students bring to regional areas will help international students feel more inclusive and welcomed by local communities. This could be achieved through a national marketing campaign targeting regional areas.

**Introduction of a ranking system to education providers** - Introduce a ranking/scoring system that recognises high performing and compliant education providers, including TAFE. Overseas students are likely to judge and select their preferred education providers by (world) ranking however this ranking system does not currently exist in Australia.

**Borders open to low-risk countries (COVID)** - Increasing promotion of Australian education to countries deemed low risk will help continue to support international education. If borders are open to low-risk countries, potential students have the option to enrol in either onshore or offshore course delivery.

**Elevation of VET qualifications** - National support and promotion of VET qualifications will help overseas students to further explore opportunities outside higher education. Studying a VET course is just as rewarding as a university course as it produces highly skilled graduates with employment outcomes and remuneration comparable to those of university graduates.

#### 2. Student Experience

##### 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?

The student experience of the new strategy should maximise opportunities for students to connect with domestic students and their education provider's services, their local community, employment (in line with visa requirements), and their future industry. Partnerships with Australian stakeholders, groups and organisations can provide connectedness, for both offshore and online delivery. Industry tours also help students to gain

insights into their chosen industry while building relationships and communication with partners. Tours strengthen international relations through uniquely combining Australian vocational education with travel while promoting a particular region to a wider global audience as a must-see study and travel destination.

In providing the best possible student experience, the Australian approach to international education should consider:

- Promoting both study and lifestyle benefits of Australia as a package, with a separate focus on regional areas.
- Providing education on Australian life to showcase culture, values and society structures to help students integrate and feel at home as soon as they arrive.
- Improving post-enrolment support to international students which can be enforced by legislation (ie. ESOS Act). Post enrolment support including more incentives and actively promoting the benefits of VET programs will help attract students to TAFE courses. This will give overseas students greater options knowing VET produces excellent results and superior job outcomes and/or pathways to higher education.
- A targeted focus on regional areas, such as Geelong (the second largest regional city in Victoria), which are experiencing significant population growth. An increase in scholarships and grants in these regions will assist students and help support international student programs offered by education providers such as TAFE.

### 3. A Global Leader

#### What changes are needed to make Australia more globally competitive over the next decade?

For Australia to become more globally competitive from a VET perspective, several proposed changes can be implemented to enhance the current capabilities, processes and structures within the sector, such as:

- Ensuring the quality of programs and employment outcomes are high. If we are to compete against other countries such as Canada, USA and the UK, our education system will need to consistently produce exceptional results to generate increased interest in living and studying in Australia.
- Addressing the high living costs of students. In regional areas the living expenses are generally cheaper which can be an attractive incentive for students exploring their options. By increasing the promotion of studying in regional areas, and offering government subsidies, Australia is better equipped to attract international students to these regions. A regional plan for study is beneficial not only for students but the local economies.
- Offering a migration program that provides incentives to students to stay or study longer. This could be in the form of course credits or bonuses that support the student's next visa application.
- Extra post study stay extends to students who have graduated from the vocational sector. This will assist those students wanting to enrol in a university course on completion of their VET training. Improving post-enrolment support to international students which can be enforced by legislation (ie. ESOS Act).
- As mentioned in response to Q1, implementing a more transparent and clearer visa program will benefit both student and education provider. This involves amending current GTE requirements so that student visa applications are assessed on the 'willingness' to study but not the intention of their post-study plan.
- Allow international students to work over 40 hours a fortnight so they have the option to work unlimitedly on weekends and public holidays, especially to key shortage areas such as hospitality, health sectors and in regional areas. The 40-hours of work a fortnight should only apply to weekdays.

### **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?**

The education sector can leverage its policy and regulatory flexibility to pursue opportunities and remain at the forefront of global competition and innovation by addressing:

**Communication** – Some students do not fully understand the policies and regulations, therefore it is imperative that they are supported and adequately informed through regular information sessions.

**Review process** – Policies should be reviewed on an as-needs basis rather than the scheduled review dates. Authorities should also act and respond swiftly.

**Flexibility in VET sector delivery** – Accredited training of full qualifications is more rigidly defined by training package requirements. For offshore delivery this can create challenges: some VET training packages and qualifications have significant focus on Australian legislation and licensing and require training and assessment to comply with Australian legislation and standards that are not relevant or aligned with those in the student's home country. For example, assessment in childcare settings that meet Australian legislation and registration requirements may not be achievable. Or study and assessment of working inclusively with Australian Indigenous people is unlikely to be relevant offshore.

**VET qualifications specifically designed for offshore delivery** – Offshore delivery of programs could be further developed. Some work has been completed in this area already, such as Training and Assessment and Early Childhood Education, however there is considerable scope to develop other courses based on the market needs of other countries.

**Visa limitations** – Current student visa settings limit students' ability to study additional courses concurrently with their visa-approved course of study. Opportunities for students to supplement their learning and work skills with concurrent study would benefit students.

**Supporting skills shortages in regional areas** – Adjusting the current policy to encourage student's recruitment in the VET sector and regional areas according to skill shortages in the Australian labour market will be a welcome measure for both students and industry. This ensures the industry skills gaps are addressed and students are willing and supported to live and work in affordable areas outside the major cities.

## **4. Working Collaboratively**

### **How can providers, governments and stakeholders work together to achieve diversification opportunities (for example of disciplines, source countries, study destinations and delivery models)?**

Improving the international student experience is a collective responsibility therefore it is important that providers, governments and stakeholders work together to develop and enhance international education in Australia for years to come, particularly once borders re-open. Connecting and facilitating relationships among organisations will help diversify and expand knowledge and expertise across the sector and open doors to further opportunities. Industry connections are vital as they ensure courses are innovative and meet current and evolving industry requirements.

Collaborative projects that can diversify opportunities include:

- Industry tours - As mentioned in our response to Q2, industry tours are a great form of international collaboration and supporting students to gain insights into their chosen industry while building relationships and communication with partners.
- Higher Education and VET sector working together rather than competitively to provide opportunities for students
- Courses delivered in partnership with industry and leading employers.



## 5. Future Skills

### What are the necessary skills for the future that students should be prepared for?

International students often need help to develop key soft and transferable skills to prepare for work upon graduation. These are valuable attributes to have in addition to acquiring and developing technical skills. Critical thinking, communication, adaptability, creativity, communication, problem-solving and hands-on experience are necessary skills students should have when seeking a job in Australia or their home country (or other countries).

International students can find it challenging to integrate into local communities and establish local networks which are often helpful for finding work experience opportunities or graduate employment. Soft and transferrable skills are highly regarded by employers and enables students to have the skills to deal with any situation that may arise in the workplace.

### 5.1 How can Australia improve employability outcomes for international students, ensuring they have the necessary skills to compete in a globally competitive labour market?

The employability of international graduates is both a key priority and a significant challenge for Australian educational institutions. International students are looking for more than just an overseas qualification; they are also seeking relevant skills and work experience that will enhance their career, either in Australia, their home country or another country. Above all, international graduates are seeking educational opportunities that provide a point of differentiation in a highly competitive global labour market. Ways employability outcomes can be improved include:

- Regular tracking and checking of skills requirements with global industries;
- Ensuring courses meet industry requirements and students are job ready by their graduation;
- Strengthening links with key industries so that students move straight into employment;
- Implement an internships program so both employers and students can experience the benefits of international students. Employers involved in this program would be financially supported by the Australian Government.

## 6. A Unique Education Experience

### How do we create a uniquely Australian education experience?

#### 6.1 What is our value proposition for both international and domestic students?

As a destination for study, Australia offers students a unique experience with high quality education, an English-speaking environment and a laid-back lifestyle that has contributed to building a strong 'brand Australia' in the international market. Studying in Australia is more than just study; there is a large emphasis on balancing study with work and lifestyle. It is important to promote both the study and lifestyle benefits of Australia as a package, with a separate focus on regional areas which are experiencing population growth and are generally cheaper to live.

Mining and agriculture have been the economic backbone of Australia which are sectors that could be promoted to the international market and incorporated into the curriculum. Leveraging this key point of difference, courses in farming, agriculture and mining could be developed to provide employment outcomes in these industries.

#### 6.2 How do we offer an Australian education experience while complementing the value of Australian offshore and online education?

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a greater shift to online learning and the need for flexible delivery modes while maintaining the integrity and quality of courses. The pandemic has shown that Australian education can still be experienced via the virtual world through innovative programs available to offshore and online students. These enable students to experience Australian education from anywhere in the world. An example are virtual study tours which provide students with online language learning and a range of other skills such as preparation for job interviews and experiences of Australian culture. Pandemic travel restrictions and lockdowns are not obstacles to delivery of such programs.

Additionally, flexibility in delivery modes will enable students to complete as much of their course as possible online while the offshore components of their training undergo the student visa process.

## 7. Community Support and Understanding

**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 wider community?**

It is important for both local communities and international students to gain a better understanding of each other. This helps students feel more accepted and part of the community. Increasing this awareness supports the public to understand the value and positive impact international students have on communities. Other ways to enhance the understanding of this sector include:

- Inviting international students or student associations of education providers to participate in community events;
- Encourage associations to donate or support (in a different format, such as being a volunteer) at community events;
- Government to financially support community groups using income received from international students for engagement and integration projects and activities
- Increased funding opportunities for projects to connect international education sector with international students.