

12 May 2021

To whom it may concern,

Re: Response to the new Australian Strategy for International

Discussion Questions

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

We need renewed clarity of purpose - including rationalization of the role of geography in order to develop a parallel set of priorities: Our traditional modus operandi has been to privilege place and language embedded access. We built an education-centric immigration wall around our provision that required applicants to make the concessions.

So, do we principally want overseas students fitting themselves to our systems or do we want brand Australia to make the biggest possible impact in the region and globally? Current sensitivities notwithstanding, how will we locate our education (economy, culture, commerce opportunity) in Chinese or Indian consciousness, for example much of the briefing for this questionnaire rehearses why we are good and what we have to offer. The question is, is what we offer better than that offered by the US or the UK, Northern Europe or even China other than providing another doorway into residency? Can we utilise our 2nd tier status and our physical place in the world to build enhanced social and commercial pathways between countries/cultures to utilize that multiculturalism to which the notes refer, to create a significant local and global impact?

The focus should therefore be to base the strategy on a clear understanding of the globalisation of higher education. This implies having a clear view and strategy around onshore and offshore involvement and opportunities. The key priorities should be to optimise local opportunity for domestic delivery, diversifying source countries and concurrently reducing reliance on physically mobile students coming into the country by extending our reach.

Against the background of taking a local and global perspective, grounded in an internationalisation focus, it is possible to define a value proposition that accommodates the diversity, needs and aspirations of international students. The Higher Education foundation and the credibility we have established should be further developed to serve this broader vision. This rests on quality onshore delivery, online delivery linked to effective support facilities, such as partnerships or learning centres driven by hybrid and blended modes of delivery.

This also implies a clear commitment being spelled out within the strategic framework, giving expression to the opportunities and benefits of either coming to Australia or engaging from another country. This would include academic quality and relevance, the support environment, societal and professional characteristics supporting local and online learning, as well as potential further opportunities beyond completing a qualification such as post study work rights earned in a flexible manner. This perspective can be supported by being specific about the nexus between international students and educated migrants addressing our national skills requirements especially in regional areas.

Part of the strategy should be a clear support environment and simplified processes around participation in opportunities available in or from Australia to ensure that we have a student friendly environment, well supported by the regulatory, statutory and also comprehensive support capacity.

Summary of some key priorities:

Develop a balance between competition and collaboration in the Australian University sector.

The international market is extremely competitive and fragmented, with numerous players. Australian Universities compete aggressively with each other for students. This phenomenon has been largely unregulated. An opportunity exists to build strength in the way we compete with other countries. Key competitor countries for undergraduate and postgraduate international students are the US and the UK. We have a distinct advantage in being a safe country with respect to Covid. We have always been considered a safe country for overseas parents to send their students to and this became apparent

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with adverse activities throughout the world. We have generally been considered a place of second choice; parents either sent their students to the UK or the US and often this was because they had travelled and studied as young adults in these countries. However, we now have a generation of Australian alumni. Loyalty to institutions, particularly in Asia, is deep. The key priority is to strike a balance and develop not only individualistic competitiveness but deepen the quality of education through centres of excellence that bring disciplines together to develop unique and highly differentiated programs of education. There has been very little coordinated assistance to the Universities to incentivise such initiatives. The priority is to ensure that a unique, quality student experience is enabled for students

Expand focus on student mobility programs to a range of delivery platforms to enable empowerment at the individual student and staff level.

The reigniting of the Colombo Plan has been largely successful - this should continue and be elevated in prominence but also be extended to a broader range of outreach modalities. Approximately 40 - 50 years ago this was extremely positive and brought a whole generation of students to Australian Universities.

Develop a more sophisticated industry-academia employment opportunity program.

Many of the international postgraduate students want to stay in Australia and are often seeking employment in their chosen field. Some postgraduate programs offer internships/placements however these initiatives need to be more consistent.

For example, in the fastest growing economy in Australia, Western Sydney, students in local University postgraduate coursework engineering and project management programs have not consistently been able to realise their desire to obtain local experience during their programs. As Australia extends its reach through a variety of international delivery platforms we are going to need to become more clever at meeting these objectives in and out of country – thereby expanding the brand through outreach.

Government priority should be to enable scalable employment opportunities, not just individual examples - this is where we can explore arrangements with multi-national companies that operate overseas and in Australia - leading to gainful employed either in Australia or across the globe.

Develop a greater diversity in HDR degree types, delivery mode and Candidature management.

Research students simply do not have to be in country to study for a research degree. Prioritise and incentivise institutions to develop more flexible study arrangements where students do not have to be physically located in Australia. If Australian institutions systematically developed strong partnerships with international institutions, the cotutelle degree would become a much more seamless arrangement.

Incentivising institutions to develop quicker and more efficient administration systems is a high priority.

Coupled with this when international students are funded by ARC grants with Scholarships, quicker research management systems allowing academic transfer and student mobility between institutions will be required.

Support Australian discipline excellence and mobility

Australia does excel in certain professional disciplines which are highly regarded internationally providing high quality education in, for example, architecture, construction management and nursing amongst others. International agreements on educational standards allow our graduates an 'international passport' and the opportunity to be mobile post-graduation. Australia also excels in training research students in both the sciences and humanities. In some disciplines the international agreements are well established in both professional accreditation and educational accreditation. Some professional associations have worked extremely hard for this international recognition and have developed well regarded pathways for professional registration. Building on the standards that have

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been set and the recognition established, the Australian government should prioritise support for the strong relationships that exist between professional associations and educational institutions.

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?

Open access has become the frame of reference for international Higher Education - allowing access to as many people as possible. Putting students at the centre clearly suggests a deep understanding of the learning and personal needs of students across a range of cultures accommodated by a supportive learning and social environment

Institutions should therefore have the capacity and sensitivity to create this type of environment. The regulatory requirements and quality processes of institutions should ensure that this type of ethos and practice exists across the sector.

In practice this implies the expansion of all stages of access and the student lifecycle into as many flexible modalities, on flexible platforms that cater to diverse localities and needs. This includes movement between modalities, languages and places to offer the greatest range of (quality validated) outcomes.

This will involve enhancing not only pastoral care services but essentially focussing on ensuring all graduates are job ready and also international citizens who will be employable in any location around the world. Targeting soft skills such as networking, presentation, working in groups etc. is critical for future success and should be embedded into any experience.

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

- i. 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?

As above we need to be more proactive around embracing flexible delivery opportunities local and global while we focus on preparing the jobs/students/migrants pathway. This is not something we should shy away from as destinations such as Canada are winning in this space. Expansion of Post Study Work Rights needs to be investigated and more certainty and clarity on future skills in demand (again especially in regional areas) will help students assess their options more readily.

Affordability of tuition is key as we now have some of the most expensive options for study in the world, in large part due to Public Universities driving high prices to utilise international students as a significant source of revenue.

As argued earlier it is imperative that our regulatory and statutory environment confirms the principles of openness and student centredness. It is imperative that processes should be flexible and predictable - for example our CRICOS requirements should facilitate our students being able to experience the Australian environment more readily and build their capacity more gradually, through a variety of initial entry steps.

Much of our regulatory environment does not present an inviting context. This is an extremely difficult social and regulatory discussion to which education can contribute but which it can't fix unilaterally.

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

In the first instance it is important that we have a sector wide focus and not limit or privilege attention to Public Institutions. It is imperative to agree on the parameters of the strategy and facilitate regular assessment of the impact of the strategy across the sector to identify learning points and create a proactive approach around continuous innovation in creating a successful environment for international HE practice.

The success of such a strategy depends on access to information, an appropriate and efficient regulatory environment and data on trends and practices in the sector. This should enable institutions to refine their own strategies and practice, as well as enable participation across the sector. It is therefore suggested that a longitudinal research process focusses on a continuum of international trends and local practices to create a data and information source for continuous engagement and planning. On this basis the prioritisation of new areas and practices for development will facilitate new thinking as well as extending the list of source countries – possibly involving the optimisation of shared spaces, capacity and geographies.

Supporting the success of institutions inevitably forms the foundation for strong participation and growth.

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

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

Firstly, by recognising all students are international students. Internationalisation of the curriculum involves building global attitudes and intellectual property to broaden the space into which graduates can enter the new world of work.

Secondly it is imperative to remain cognisant of an evolving global context and the radically changing world of work. This should sensitise the sector to understanding a student-centered perspective on the total learning experience of students facilitating the development of well-rounded graduates with the key competencies required for the 4th and 5th Industrial revolutions. This will ensure that students are prepared for a focus on self-employment and development of entrepreneurs so that employability is driven from within the individual not something that happens to them (or not) - students that create opportunities for themselves and leverage them; students able to self-regulate and manage their risks; that are resilient and self-aware and lifelong learners in a gig economy and a world of hour less contracts. We might do well to recognise students engaging in international education as leaders, not followers.

Ensuring that internationalisation is integrated in the learning experience of students should enable the global mobility of students and the adaptability to the changing, networked economy.

In essence it is therefore necessary that we change the paradigm away from institutions controlling leaning to become partners with their local and global industries, societies and research institutions. This should assist in answering the question on what employability outcomes we can offer South American, Middle Eastern and Indian students for example, certainly not employment for very many in our small economy. And that goes for domestic students as well who need to learn to work in the global space. They may not need to travel but they will need to think and work into the global marketplace in their careers. We should therefore disengage with place a little and think about recruitment and learning platforms for people from anywhere to work anywhere.

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6. How do we create a uniquely Australian education experience?

- i. What is our value proposition for both international and domestic students?

Our unique capacities might quite possibly be counter intuitive – we could be unique in not trying to be unique per se but uniquely inter-cultural and international in a globalising context. We can't and don't want to downplay our first world capacities for quality, but a key value is to have that in our geographic location and employ it in support of all learning. That's not new knowledge, international industry and commerce have been using Australia as a safe haven in SEA throughout the twentieth century.

- ii. How do we offer an Australian education experience while complementing the value of Australian offshore and online education?

For a start by not confusing Australian place with Australian capacity. We need to work harder at identifying our educational/intellectual offer separated from place.

What does having an 'Australian education experience' mean as opposed to a quality global education experience?

The ability to deliver quality and relevant education forms the basis for providing learning opportunities that will meet the requirements of appropriate content, linked to applicable pedagogy and clear outcomes. Developing curricula in context should result in local capacity being utilised, but must also find a broader reference in a global world through relevant internationalisation.

Maintaining this balance will ensure the best of what we have onshore remains in synergy with the best available internationally.

7. Community support for the international education sector is important for the sector's social license. How can the benefits this sector provides to Australia be better understood by wider community?

The basis of community support rests on improved public understanding and experience of the practice of engaging international students into broader society and the local community for everyone's benefit.

A balanced perspective should be promoted through sharing a narrative about benefits to the economy, the development of key skills, the offer of diversity to all citizens and the value of an international network.

This requires a concerted effort by government and HE institutions to introduce and maintain continuous communication about the value and demands of creating effective host environments and to ensure that there is appreciation of the value and opportunities of having a representative body of international students contributing to society and the diversity of experience in our HE system.

8. What else should the Council for International Education and the Australian Government consider in developing the new Strategy?

- Learn from the China scenario – too much focus on one market which leads to great instability when circumstances, be they geo-political or health related, change. Open up under realised markets such as Africa and Latin America with a significant population base and a mutually beneficial demographic.
- Focus on promoting a national HE ethos that includes
 - a philosophy that understands the benefit of local learning within the global environment,
 - Policy and capacity for an enhanced execution plan.

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- Building a much bigger picture than individual institutional interest requiring the development of a national HE systems perspective inclusive of a relevant value proposition, with sufficient flexibility for individual competitiveness – as well as growth through synergy.
- In a nutshell – how do we continue to develop our own capacity to provide HE locally, while bringing the world to us and taking ourselves to the world through educational outreach, opportunity and flexibility by also meeting international societies and partners in synergy on their terms?
- Consider and consciously plan for the management and growth of a vibrant international alumni to enhance the effect of soft diplomacy and market growth around a positive Australia brand.
- Maintain caution around constructive open access opportunities in balance with national security interests.

If you would like to speak further regarding the University's response to the strategy please contact my Executive Assistant, Ms Lisa Smith (lisa.smith@Torrens.edu.au) and she will be able to assist with an appointment.

Kind regards



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