



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

## **UOW Submission to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's consultation paper on the proposed Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030**

**May 2021**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The University of Wollongong (UOW) welcomes the opportunity to provide input in response to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment's consultation paper on the proposed Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030.

This Submission provides a response to each of the Discussion Questions outlined in the consultation paper. It confirms UOW's strong support for the Federal Government's commitment to lead the recovery of Australia's international education sector from the impact of COVID-19. The submission also confirms UOW's desire to work collaboratively with all tiers of government to help drive this recovery and ensure Australia maintains its reputation as a desirable destination for international students and a provider of high quality tertiary education.

The international higher education sector is changing rapidly. In considering Australia's Strategy for International Education for 2021-2030 and setting related goals and targets within this Strategy, UOW urges the Federal Government to be ambitious and focus on ensuring Australia remains an innovative, world leader of higher education.

### **ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

UOW is a leading global university powered by its people, partnerships and communities. Throughout our global network, UOW works together with industry, research partners, governments, communities and other universities to address society's critical economic, environmental, social and health challenges.

UOW is a global community of learners, researchers, experts and leaders. A benchmark for Australia's new generation of universities, UOW is recognised internationally for the quality of our education, research impact, and industry and community engagement.

A research-intensive university, UOW is an international network of campuses and regional learning centres. In addition to its Australian metropolitan and regional campuses, UOW delivers world-class teaching to students in the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia and Singapore. UOW has formal agreements with more than 400 overseas institutions in 46 countries spanning research collaborations, teaching collaborations, credit arrangements, articulation arrangements, study abroad and exchange programs and offshore program delivery.

As the Australasian member of the University Global Partnership Network (UGPN), UOW's strong international outlook is demonstrated by partnerships with peers and industry, government and community-based organisations across the world.

UOW continues to provide solutions that support emerging businesses and transform existing industries by helping them to adopt advanced technologies and innovative systems. The University is committed to creating environments where entrepreneurship and innovation can thrive so research can be rapidly transferred into commercial products and services.

A dynamic university renowned for being innovative and agile, UOW plays a fundamental role in driving social and economic change in communities across NSW and Australia.

Generating over \$2.5 billion in gross output annually, UOW is leading locally by competing globally. Strategic partnerships between the University, entrepreneurs, industry, business and government are accelerating innovation and our transformative projects are reshaping communities, research, education, healthcare and industries for the future. The University continually works with its communities to create a positive future

from the new opportunities that will arise during the challenging times ahead. UOW inspires a better future through education, research and partnership.

UOW has also developed the Innovation Campus in Wollongong, which is an education, research and technology precinct. This state of the art facility provides strong linkages between business and research, and complements the University's leading research and innovation institutes.

The award-winning research, innovation and commercial precinct contributes enormously to the Illawarra economy each year, helping to activate new economic activity and regional jobs and enhancing the region's competitive edge across a range of sectors.

The precinct is home to a number of UOW's multidisciplinary research institutes, along with a well-established community of innovation companies that are strongly engaged with the University.

In addition, UOW, in conjunction with development partner Lendlease, is currently developing the innovative \$500 million Health and Wellbeing Precinct to be built at the Innovation Campus. The Precinct will integrate research and training environments with non-surgical health care and aged-care facilities, delivering significant benefits to the Illawarra community and beyond. Pending final planning approvals, construction of the Precinct is proposed to commence in 2022 and the facilities be fully operational by 2024.

## **INTERNATIONAL DIVERSITY**

The current COVID-19 pandemic has certainly highlighted the need for diversity. Within this context, UOW has pursued a deliberate strategy of diversification in onshore international student enrolments and offshore growth to avoid over exposure to any single market, ie China.

The University has increasingly deepened its connection with Central Asian countries, particularly India, Sri Lanka and Nepal via research agreements, transformative projects, education exchanges and academic partnerships. Some 115 nations are represented in UOW's onshore student community, with India now providing the largest cohort of international students.

This diversification has occurred alongside a steady expansion in UOW's offshore presence in recent years. In 2015 UOW Global Enterprises (UOWGE) took custodianship of the community college of Hong Kong's City University, which became UOW College Hong Kong in 2017, and in November 2019 launched UOW Malaysia KDU, having acquired the four campuses of KDU University College from Malaysian private education provider Paramount Corporation Berhad (PCB) in 2018. There are now approximately 18,000 UOW and UOW College students studying across these campuses and at UOW in Dubai, which has been operating for 28 years and moved into a new purpose-built campus in 2020. Our growth internationally has been strong and UOW is one of only four Australian universities with more offshore than onshore international students.

UOW attracts a large number of international onshore students who contribute significant export earnings to the economy at the regional, state and national levels. In 2019, UOW had close to 11,000 international onshore students of which almost half (48%) originated from Central South Asia including India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

## **RESPONSES TO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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

The Federal Government should work collaboratively with universities and other education providers to present Australia as an attractive destination for international students to attend. In doing so, a new Australian Strategy for international education should seek to:

- Emphasise that Australia is an advanced economy which is innovative and helping to drive the development of new knowledge. The International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) article '*Sustainability – is it a driver for international student destination and institution choice?*'<sup>1</sup> reports that there is consistent feedback through major international student surveys that countries with a strong commitment to sustainability are also attractive to the current student market. Evidence of Australia's commitment to sustainability should be an additional feature to promote in relation to Australia's innovation.
- Showcase Australia as a provider of high quality education. Maintaining education quality is key to supporting continuing demand for higher education offered by Australian institutions.
- Highlight Australia's geographic features which make it an attractive destination and promote it as safe and welcoming of international students. This should include Australia's high standard of healthcare and management of COVID-19.
- It should be emphasised that Australian cultural diversity is also a major reason why Australia is a safe and welcoming option.

Industry should also be more strongly encouraged to increase recruitment of international graduates. Where possible, government should look to ways, such as ensuring appropriate visa options for recent graduates, to help enable this. This would help contribute to an enhanced experience for students and graduates, and help to attract international students to study onshore at Australian institutions. Wording in the proposed vision for the Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030 (on page 10 of the consultation paper) should be expanded to encourage this greater involvement of industry and industry experiences.

### **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?**

Satisfied students are critical to the success of Australia's international education sector. Australian education providers need to focus on the provision of a range of elements of student care to help ensure international students are well supported before and throughout the course of their study. In doing so, the overall student experience will be enhanced and Australia's reputation as destination for high quality education will be maintained if not increased. This includes:

- Emphasise that the entire student experience is connected. This includes the provision of activities and support that promote inclusiveness of all students at university and in the surrounding communities, pastoral care and support, on campus experiences, transition support both pre and post arrival.
- It is important that education providers set realistic student expectations prior to their study. For international students moving in order to undertake their study, the provision of coordinated just-in-time delivery of appropriate information plays an important role in this. This can include visa information, accommodation, study and other institution specific information. The government has a role to play in this by providing clear, consistent information and decision making to students and higher education providers about matters which impact their study and travel.
- The use of technology and blended learning has expanded rapidly in recent years. It is critical that students have access to technology that allows them to participate and undertake their study in a timely manner,

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<sup>1</sup> International Education Association of Australia, Sustainability – is it a driver for international student destination and institution choice?, Brett Berquist, 3 May 2021 -

<https://www.ieaa.org.au/blog/sustainability-is-it-a-driver-for-international-student-destination-and-institution-choice>

whether they be studying face-to-face or online. Higher education providers need to ensure that students continue to have a high quality learning experience and are engaged with their study and entire learning experience in an online environment. Programs should be designed with these varying forms of delivery in mind.

- Students and graduates/alumni of Australian universities should be engaged in the development of the Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030 to help ensure its success. Most Australian universities have a policy guiding student co-design that could be harnessed for input to the strategy.
- Simplify/ incentivise the path for employers to recruit international graduates and interns. Currently many graduate recruitment programs are limited to domestic applicants only, international students often struggle to attain part-time positions and internships. Policies that support employers to recruit international students at all levels could mitigate current difficulties.
- Awareness campaign for employers on the benefits of international students as interns and recruits, perhaps through collaboration with the Australian Association of Graduate Employers. This should include better education of employers about the post-study work rights (PSW) stream visa. There is evidence from graduates that employers often think a student needs permanent residency otherwise is more difficult to employ them if they have a PSW visa.
- Improved graduate outcome data for international students is necessary to track graduate careers, and motivate international students to choose Australia. It is noted that reporting of graduate labour market outcomes by Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) focuses on domestic graduates only, as tracking labour market outcomes of international graduates has proven more difficult. QILT have stated that from the 2021 Graduate Outcomes Survey it is proposed to engage in more intensive efforts in this area (QILT, 2020, p.1). Such efforts should be supported as a priority.
- It is vital to recognise that, in the near future, high quality and immersive user experience of technology will drive the entire student experience, not just online learning. Technology development for higher education should be better supported to achieve this.

### **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?**

Strong supportive policy and regulatory factors are needed to provide a setting which enables innovation and helps to drive Australia's competitiveness in the international higher education sector. Important factors to achieve this include:

- The policy settings of the various Federal Government portfolios which impact Australia's international higher education market need to be consistent and complementary to support Australia's efforts to become more competitive over the next decade. This includes, but is not limited to, policy relating to portfolios including the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Home Affairs.
- The role of state governments in regulating higher education and promoting Australia as an international education destination needs to be clarified, as the current system is confusing and not always well aligned with federal government policy. Resources of the various tiers of government should be pooled to increase consistency and increase effectiveness of resources.
- Brand Australia plays a vital role in promoting Australia as a destination for international higher education study. Brand Australia and tertiary providers should continue to work together to provide consistent, complementary messaging about Australia. Brand Australia's ongoing role in undertaking this role is critical. It is important that this messaging is not confused by the individual efforts of states or territories to promote themselves.
- Individual universities and other higher education providers and the Federal Government need to work collaboratively to ensure the work they undertake complements and maximises the impact of efforts from all stakeholders.

- The CRICOS Register should be rethought. It is important for the Government to determine to what extent this is a starting off point for international students. Other ways of making the key information on courses available to students could be explored.
- In response to the rapidly changing international higher education environment and the probable ongoing challenges of international travel (as a result of COVID-19), consideration should be given to Australia's post study work rights (PSWR) policy being adapted permanently to acknowledge time spent in remote learning, not just as a pandemic related impact, but to open up opportunities for very high quality online delivery as a national strength that may also have some sustainability benefits. This would allow Australia to support more students learning for more of their enrolment in their home countries or elsewhere.

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

- Austrade plays a critical role in the international marketing and promotion of Australian education and training, and in the provision of timely market information. This information is invaluable in helping higher education providers make informed decisions and develop strategies to develop international relationships and business. This role should be continued.
- The Federal Government has a critical role to play in helping Australia's international education sector recover following the enormous and sudden impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, the Federal Government should focus its efforts on rebuilding transnational education opportunities in high-priority (ie. Growth and emerging) regions aligned to Australia's foreign policy, including diversification of countries of origin. The government should also support and incentivise institutions who seek to do this. Currently, Austrade resources are not optimally aligned to support the achievement of these policy objectives. More federal government resources, such as additional Business Development Managers in emerging markets such as South America, Africa and Indonesia would help to achieve this.
- Individual universities and other higher education providers and the Federal Government need to work collaboratively to ensure the work they undertake to attract international students both in Australia and overseas is complementary.
- The development of joint degree programs with international universities creates a pipeline of international students and graduates, increases opportunities for students to spend some of their education overseas/ or in Australia. More support in due diligence of international students could assist.
- Inter –university degrees within Australia will allow for specialisation and diverse cultural experiences and increase employability and employment prospects for international students.

#### **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?**

Improving employability outcomes should be a priority for all graduates, not just international students. Programs should be developed which provide acquisition of technical skills (not just knowledge) and relevant to future careers and be connected with industry. In doing so, it is important that industry become more involved in the development and delivery of programs.

As noted in response to question 2 of these Discussion Questions, an awareness campaign for employers on the benefits of international students as interns and recruits would be beneficial to improving the employability outcomes of international students. This should include better education of employers about the post-study work (PSR) stream visa.

Ensuring all students have access to quality Work Integrated Learning experiences embedded throughout their learning, ensures they remain engaged with the rapidly changing world of work, and the needs of industry.

The following table, (from an internal UOW report) draws together research on the skills needed for the future of work from a number of sources:

**Table 2: Analysis of Industry Research on Skills and Capabilities needed for the Future of Work**

Category	The Future of Jobs Report (World Economic Forum, 2018)	Future skills and training (Australian Industry & Skills Committee 2017)	LinkedIn future skills report (2019)	Workforce of the future (PwC Australia 2017)	QILT Employer Survey 2019
Continuous learning & adaptability	x	x	x	x	x
Critical thinking & problem solving	x	x	x	x	
Collaboration		x	x	x	x
Entrepreneurship & Innovation	x	x		x	x
Communication		x	x		x
Technical skills	x		x		x
Leadership	x		x	x	
Digital literacy	x	x	x		
Emotional intelligence, Empathy and social skills	x	x		x	
Self-management skills		x			x
Literacy and numeracy				x	x
Cross cultural competency		x			

The top skill/ capability across all five sources is continuous learning and adaptability. Lists of skills change as innovation increases and the world of work changes. Embedding career development learning in the curriculum empowers students with the skills to discern, recognise and articulate the skills they are gaining, identify skills gaps, make informed decisions and navigate the recruitment process in an increasing complex labour market. Tailored programs for international students enable them to gain an understanding of Australian workplace culture.

The global jobs market is not homogeneous and providers must continue to have flexibility in offering courses that are tailored to the needs of students in different markets – UOW’s long experience in delivery underlines this. UOW Global Enterprises (UOWGE) is UOW’s international operations arm. UOWGE is currently exploring opportunities to truly integrate delivery across different sites, with plans to offer subjects and courses where for example, group work is undertaken collaboratively to give students wider exposure to and interaction with students studying in different locations. This approach is already being undertaken by some teaching academics at UOW. There is also some discussion of moving some areas of expertise from offshore to onshore – at the moment almost all content flows from here out.

There is also opportunity to align Australia’s skilled migration policy for the benefit of graduating international students who have undertaken their study at an Australian higher education provider. By adapting the skilled migration policy to incentivise graduating international students wishing to gain long term or permanent residency in Australia, it could help attract high quality students to Australia and the retainment of highly skilled graduates in areas of who can help addressed skilled job shortages.

A national strategy should focus on inbound and outbound mobility-based learning as a career development asset, and develop a framework for the future of virtual international learning for Australian students onshore and offshore, as well as students prevented (for any reason including future border closures) from travelling to Australia; and in this vein we need to solve the problem of virtual placements as an accreditation barrier in some degrees.

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

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

At the centre of the value proposition for all students should be the attainment of a high quality education. Other factors of high importance which must be incorporated into Australia's value proposition however are:

- Note that Australia is a smart and innovative country.
- Emphasise high quality of life available in Australia.
- A uniquely Australian experience should give students experience of Australian workplace culture through WIL experiences including industry visits, internships, industry projects.. Emphasising the co-curricular activities are also integral to the Australian education experience through the provision of co-curricular volunteering programs, clubs and societies and industry programs, gives international students a more holistic understanding of Australia and its culture.
- For domestic students, it is important that they realise the benefits of receiving an international education. This is particularly important given Australia is geographically remote compared to many other countries. Students should recognise the value international students studying at Australian campuses have in enhancing their own experience, as well as the benefits of undertaking some overseas study as part of their own degree. These benefits could be emphasised by highlighting some of the benefits students who have undertaken overseas study have, such as higher rates of employability, case studies about student experiences.

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

- Offshore locations help Australian education providers to tap into markets whose students may not be able to travel to Australia to undertake their study for whatever reason, be it family commitments, financial limitations. These offshore locations will continue to play a critical role in Australia's international education sector as travel restrictions and other impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to have a strong impact across the world. These offshore teaching locations must still be recognised as a valuable means of gaining an Australia education experience and supported by the Federal Government.
- Government could help support the movement of students of these offshore campuses by incentivising them to undertake a portion of their study at an onshore campus of an Australian institution. One method by which this could be done is through the provision of a scholarship scheme offered to international students studying at Australian institutions at offshore locations. Such scheme could allow them, for example, to undertake a block of their study at their institutions Australian campus. This would greatly enhance these students educational experience, gaining an Australian experience first-hand, and also provide a strong incentive to students to choose a particular Australian education provider in instances where financial circumstances may prevent them from studying in Australia.
- The provision of an Australian education experience can be enhanced through careful curriculum design as well as delivery i.e. offshore subjects designed based on Australian curriculum.
- It is a challenge to offer an 'Australian educational experience' to students studying offshore and this involves providing a form of delivery that allows students to engage with students and teachers from Australia. As noted in the response to Question 5 of these Discussion questions, UOWGE is looking at ways in which to try and integrate delivery across different sites. This wider exposure provided to students has potential to help provide a more Australian educational experience to offshore students involved.
- Australia has a historically significant track record in engaging rural students who are studying remotely, which is why we are now a world leader in transnational online education. Moodle is an Australian product for a reason. The strategy should consider recommending and supporting the next stage of this as a national priority? This is an important issue which all Australian universities are currently exploring how to do effectively with a range of new platforms.

**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 the wider community?**

It is important that the wider community understand and recognise the significant value which the international education sector has upon Australian society. This not only makes the students feel more welcome in their community and leads to a more positive experience for international students studying in Australia, but can ensure that communities also reap the social and economic benefits this sector provides. The gaining of better understanding and appreciation of this sector should be achieved through not only education, but through efforts to initiate direct engagement between international students and the community.

Education providers should ensure there is ample opportunity for international students to feel welcome and involved in their local community. Local government support and involvement in the efforts of institutions to achieve this help set the tone for how a community may accept international students and their views of these students.

Welcome to Wollongong, held in conjunction with Wollongong City Council, is a successful event held in Wollongong to help welcome international students to Wollongong. It is regarded as a celebration of culture and diversity.

Increasing opportunities for international students to participate in community and industry programs gives community and industry stakeholders provide direct experience of the benefits of working in partnership with international students, and the broader global perspective they can bring.

An example of a successful program which has mutually beneficial for both participating international students and local school children in NSW is the Asia Immersion Project. In 2017 UOW was awarded a NSW International Student Award (Community Engagement) by Study NSW for this program. The program was delivered in partnership with Bomaderry High School and six primary schools in the Shoalhaven. It aimed to make a positive contribution towards the education and perceptions of young people and to inspire young Australians to study the culture and languages of Asia's nations.

The program was developed in response to the 2012 published white paper 'Australia in the Asian century' and surveys, including one conducted by the NSW Department of Education's Asia Consultant, which indicated that:

- Only one student in the 2010 Bomaderry High School population of 900 was of Asian background and only 0.9% of the local population were of Asian descent;
- Less than 10% of students had ever had contact with persons of Asian background and anecdotal feedback from teaching staff indicated distinct student prejudices towards Asian people and a lack of understanding of different cultural groups.

The annual program involves groups of international students of Asian descent travel to the Shoalhaven and spend three full days with staff and students at participating schools. At each school, UOW international students provide the school students and teaching staff with insights into their language, society, economy, historical and political backgrounds of their countries, and interactive learning experiences such as food tasting, origami, dance and language. In return international students gain an insight into the Australian education system and many have formed close relationships with some of the teaching staff at the schools. Bomaderry High School students travel to UOW to visit the Language Centre and engage in a number of intercultural student – led activities.

The engagement between the international students and local school students has resulted in significant changes in attitude and perspective. The Program is a successful mutually beneficial partnership, which has not only broken down barriers but nurtured new relationships and positive attitudes towards our Asian neighbours.



A national, government funded award scheme for community engagement with internationalisation of education (research or teaching) could promote this as a government priority, and incentivise all universities to involve their local communities in their internationalisation work. This would help with social license.

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

- Within the timespan of this strategy, we really should expect the meaning of ‘*being at university*’ to change. It is important that the Federal Government consider what 2030 will be like and be ambitious in goals and strategies which are adapted.
- Current measures of success focussed on student satisfaction are not broad enough. The Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) mandates a range of measures for quality, including progression, completion, and comparative performance. To this can be added employment outcomes and employer satisfaction.
- The Council should also consider the creation of an industry and community advisory group and a student advisory group, including both international and domestic students and alumni. These groups could be utilised for consultation and ideas in development and implementation of the strategy.
- Increasing resources to universities to help provide a high quality education experience for all students.
- Consider providing an enhanced grant scheme associated with high-priority growth areas of international education, such as the Australia India Strategic Research Fund.

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The University would welcome further opportunities to elaborate upon, or further clarify, the matters raised within this submission. To do so, please do not hesitate to contact the UOW Director, Government Relations (Mr Canio Fierravanti) on Ph - 42215931 or via Email - [caniof@uow.edu.au](mailto:caniof@uow.edu.au).

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