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Submission by VISION International, An Association of Australian Schools on the consultation paper for the Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030.

Discussion questions

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

- It is important to recognise the damaging impact that blanket border closure has had on student enrolment in Australian schools in 2020, 2021 and for at least the next 3 years. Many schools will close their programs permanently.
- Short term and long term strategies need to be considered. Other countries such as the UK have continued to welcome students, taking advantage of Australia's closed border. By not providing a 'safe travel corridor' for international students, Australia's actions may be considered 'unwelcoming.' The need for 'safe travel corridor' applies to new student enrolments as well as for school students, who have remained in Australia since January 2020, to travel home for the 2021-2022 summer holiday period and return to their studies, face-to-face, in 2022. By the end of the 2021 school year, many students will have been physically separated from their families for two years. Such is the commitment and trust that both families overseas and students place in the safety and support provided by Australian schools offering high school education.
- Policy should be put in place to safeguard against a similar long term blanket approach being applied to the sector in the future. The secondary education sector is highly regulated, well managed and closely monitored by education institutions, with student safety and wellbeing as high priorities. School institutions are compliant with the law and regulatory guidelines, and are resourced by qualified and passionate staff, have much experience and are well supported by school leadership. Focused and ongoing consultation with the sector to find a solution would be greatly appreciated.
- Cooperation and collaboration between the Department of Education and Training, state regulatory authorities and school associations/school representatives is critical in planning for the safe return of students.
- It can be argued that the Department of Education and Training, International Division, could be more inclusive and collaborative with non-government schools both in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 situation, as well as in normal operating times, if we are to promote Australian Education as a whole and the country as a quality education destination offering choices for students.

- We also need to understand that there is a large proportion of students who enrol to study in Australia for the purpose of applying for permanent residency, as well as those who wish only to receive a quality Australian education and industry based experience before returning to their home country.
- A focus on alumni, considering their voice and experiences, would be key to the rebuild of Australia as a quality education destination.

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?

- Students do their own research and are discerning, putting equal emphasis on the quality of education and lifestyle aspirations when selecting a course to study. They are considering location and lifestyle options, in addition to the course and methods of delivery. Students seem keen to enjoy the Australian lifestyle and personal freedoms that citizens enjoy.
 - o Student voice must be the focus. We need to question and understand what students are looking for in both areas
 - o Marketing strategies should address these points specifically. Education agents should be fully informed and updated.
 - o Education course offerings, specifically at the secondary school level, should match these expectations – at present, international students are usually not enrolled in VCAL whereas there seems to be considerable interest in students from overseas to acquire skill based training which is often not accessible in their home countries.
- High School enquiry based education offers a sound learning foundation to students with high academic aspirations for their tertiary course. It also allows students to adjust to Australian culture in a safe and supported environment, to acquire networking skills and engage with their peers. This experience often gives students a social safety net that supports them through their tertiary studies and into the work force. It can be argued that students who commence their Australian experience in school are able to build a successful foundation for tertiary education.
- Sister school programs can provide the opportunity to promote the quality and advantages of an Australian education. The benefits could be two fold – enhancing the global connectedness of local students whilst encouraging student exchange and enrolments from students wishing to complete their high school in Australia. We should encourage more sister school connections within countries from which overseas students

can effectively be sourced in the next decade. Teacher exchange within the sister school arrangements, may also contribute in promoting Australian education.

- Increased transnational opportunities for the School Sector should be made available, as well as increased government support to continue to build on already established exchange and sister school programs.

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

- A long term plan is necessary, hence the Strategy 2021-2030 is an important step towards re-establishing a purpose and goal. The goals should also be clear – will Australia be a fun place to study English or receive a qualification? Will Australia offer a globally recognised quality education from schooling to a Masters degree, that will effectively prepare a student for a career, and enhance earning capacity?
 - The plan or strategy should be implemented across agencies so that the goal is clearly understood and implemented for the country as a whole.
 - It is important to be inclusive and collaborative when fine tuning a Strategy to integrate the various needs and capabilities of the key players in both the public and private education sector, in the delivery of education opportunities for overseas students.
 - Strong regulation and accountability of the education programs and student welfare and wellbeing is necessary for both the Government and private sectors to avoid discrepancies in how student welfare and wellbeing is implemented and monitored.
 - The development of the National Code of Standards for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 has been very welcome, as are VRQA’s exchange program and boarding facility regulations. Clear direction is important. Providers would also appreciate training in these areas, to ensure that there is clear understanding of expectations and implementation strategies across both the private and public education provider institutions.
- 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?
- Our courses, subject offerings and style of delivery should take into account future workplace needs and subjects that will lead to viable career opportunities. We need to offer relevant education and training so that students are globally employable.
 - Focus on education programs that will enhance global citizenship capabilities and encourage intercultural connectedness/understanding.

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 schools, the face to face delivery method works best. Student/family sentiment supports this – an international education assumes full student immersion in another culture.
- Encourage and facilitate sister school opportunities in diverse countries, with a method of vetting schools through Austrade services in those countries. This will enhance global connectivity and improve the mindset of students to think beyond their neighbourhood, country and region.
- Encourage Australian schools to continue to develop offshore study opportunities for school students, e.g., Offshore VCE (or equivalent state programs) including Year 10 & 11 (2+1 model) programs in schools overseas with a view to students completing Year 12 in Australia. However, there should be one curriculum and body of resources, developed by VCAA or State equivalent, that can be accessed by any school, government and non-government, that engages in such programs.
- It is also important to be true to History, and an acknowledgement of the true Australian history in our school curriculum is necessary. We should respect and include First Nations culture and people, and be much more inclusive of their history, culture and languages in our education system. One of the advantages of enrolling students from overseas is the intercultural competencies it engenders in Australian students and the community. We need to keep in mind that our Australian students would benefit from developing cultural competency in the First Nations people's history, language and culture.

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

- Computer and Information Technology is evolving rapidly. Future students should be prepared adequately to both use new technology and learn development skills in these areas. Courses should cater to both these needs.
- It is important for students to retain the ability to analyse, compare and contrast information, be curious, learn to read, to write and calculate. Traditional methods of learning and skill development should be the backbone of any education program. This belief underpins the conclusion that online learning is not an adequate method of delivering a qualification.
- Careers are changing. Mechanics and robotics pervade many industries and have taken over many routine tasks for which people were employed. However, it is apparent that society is demanding improved medical and mental health care, better work-life balance, easier access to basic needs and flexibility in education programs to suit a variety of learning abilities and interests. Therefore, programs and course selections for future

students should be attuned to what society is looking for and preparing students for future careers.

- It is also important to develop trade skills and creativity in students. It can be argued that these will be highly valued abilities/qualities in future society.
- i. How can Australia improve employability outcomes for international students, ensuring they have the necessary skills to compete in a globally competitive labour market?
 - o Encourage enrolment in secondary school programs as this gives students the advantage of adapting to enquiry based learning, honing English skills, networking with local students, cultural knowledge and intercultural understanding as well as building sustaining friendships. Students integrate well at secondary level due to the addition of varied co-curricular opportunities such as sport, camps, music, performance program and whole school events. School settings often give students the individual learning and specific mentoring support that tertiary education simply cannot provide. The acquired social and learning skills coupled with a familiarity with Australian ways and multicultural living environment gives students an edge in the employment market. At tertiary level, it is noted that students will most often live and socialise with those from their region or country of origin.

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

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

An Australian education experience for international students should offer:

- o A high quality education program
- o A safe and welcoming place to live and learn
- o An understanding of the all-round character and personal development that is part of our education system
- o Respect for the culture of international students
- o Teachers who are trained to work with international students and foster integration and team work in the classroom
- o The ability to travel and work in Australia while on a student visa
- o An understanding of the history and geography of this amazing country

For domestic students, being in a classroom or education environment with international students will offer exposure to other cultures, languages, lifestyles and hopefully enhance intercultural competencies. A school environment is the best place for this to occur, as this is where children realise their identity, form their beliefs, and create supporting networks for their higher education. Enrolling international students in schools could be

an effective way to infuse awareness and knowledge of the bigger world beyond their neighbourhood in the minds of domestic students and improve their understanding and tolerance of other cultures.

- ii. How do we offer an Australian education experience while complementing the value of Australian offshore and online education?
 - By studying with and being exposed to genuine students from overseas, domestic students improve their global perspectives, and broaden their thinking. They also learn cultural sensitivity, understanding and respect. At a school level and during formative years in a child's life, there is the least amount of prejudice towards students from overseas, due to the nurturing and supportive school environment. It is an excellent place to develop global understanding in domestic students by enhancing student bodies with enrolment from overseas students.
 - At a Primary school level, sister school arrangements could be effective in preparing the mindset of domestic students to understand and accept overseas students from other cultures, who speak languages other than English.
 - Branding Australia as a multicultural and equal opportunity country is important and more demonstration of this in practice will be beneficial. Inclusivity and respect for all cultures should be a priority.
 - Offshore/online education may be an effective delivery method for theory based subjects or courses, when a student is unable to travel to Australia. It is a useful tool for preparatory courses. However, it cannot replace face to face learning, skill development, engagement with peers and the real lived experience. It is not an effective learning method for the schools sector. It is recommended to build on the experience of existing and successful transnational programs.

7. 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 to identify the values that Australians cherish and consider the backbone of the 'Australian Culture' despite the original cultural heritage of Australia's residents - fairness, honesty, mateship, caring for each other and respect for the environment. These qualities are expected in our society, whatever the original cultural heritage of Australia's residents.

- The narrative should be that Australian values are treasured. However, it is also important to keep in perspective that Australian culture is a changing, diverse culture, that expands to include the multicultural citizens that make up its body of residents. More acknowledgement and inclusion is due, of the indigenous cultures that existed before invasion and since, that make up the current Australian blended society.

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

- The school sector strongly believes that there is much to be gained by encouraging the enrolment of students in the school sector which gives them a head start when it comes to tertiary education. Students who have experienced a school education have a more in-depth understanding of the Australian education system, culture and environment.
- Acknowledge the support of the Australian community, e.g., Homestay providers and educational businesses the support the sector, such as those that provide language testing, student care and translation services.

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