

Q20.

Australian Strategy for International Education consultation submission

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Q1. Name *

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Q2. Organisation *

VicWISE, Victorian Working Group for International Student Employability

Q3. Occupation/role at the organisation (if applicable)

Vice President

Q4. Contact email address *

[REDACTED]

Q5. Contact phone number

Q6. 1 - What do you see as the key priorities for a new Australian strategy for international education? [limit to 500 words]

VicWISE believes rebuilding the sector will require sustainability at the fore front, providing clear pathways in and out. Obviously, students need to have clear, realistic expectations of what their studies and related opportunities will be. For Australia to stand out and be a world leading study destination those opportunities need to be on par or better than our rival study destinations. So, what can we do that they can't? Perhaps focussing on our regional advantage as a bridge between east and west cultural perspectives. The affordability of proximity, the advantage of creating a global mindset close to the student's home base. We need some points of difference. Including a real focus on building bridges and mutual benefit for of Australia, home country, and of course the international student, as well as with domestic students. How can we build these bridges and be more strategic? Too much student focus is on migration outcomes. Government and university / education providers need to lead these initiatives and help build connections. For example; Perhaps in the current climate when there are skills shortages, federally funded programs that have contractual obligations to only employ citizens should be allowed to employ non-citizen and under graduates. A win-win for the international education sector and government agencies struggling to meet the demand for skilled employees. If it was easy to change work hours internationals could do during the pandemic perhaps another rapid response is achievable?

Q7. 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? [limit to 500 words]

Leading on from my comments above, education providers need to initiate more programs and activities to assist with building bridges and harnessing what international students have to offer? Perhaps a move away from the cash cow, financial perspective of international education and a greater focus on the core business of educating the domestic and international student population in Australian values that will enhance interaction between business and study providers. Values such as collaboration and giving back to the community. There are many programs in this direction but a systemic promotion and further development of them would go a long way to extending the interaction and getting students both domestic and international the experience they need in their fields to become employable. Our international students are Australia's influencers of the future – a soft power that needs to be harnessed.

Q8. 3 - What changes are needed to make Australia more globally competitive over the next decade? [limit to 500 words]

Is delivering what committees of well-meaning but perhaps unaware or ill-informed policy makers decide what is really needed? Engaging proactively with international students might be a better starting point. Focus on what International students actually want, by asking them directly. We know it is difficult to get students to respond to surveys so perhaps framing them as a means of agency would assist this. For instance, asking them ; "Help shape the course of the future". Make it compulsory but not onerous. Perhaps implementing some of what was described above could lead to this?

Q22. 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? [limit to 500 words]

In our survey of student VicWISE members, the most common comment to this question was to make it easier for international students to work. Specifically, they felt that resolving the following issues would make Australia more globally competitive and attractive as a study destination.;

1. Increased working hours
2. Labour market testing removed
3. Fast tracking of previous experience or qualifications
4. More Work integrated learning opportunities before they graduate
5. For WIL work to be counted as experience not working hours
6. A percentage of graduate places to be set aside for IS's
7. And to make it compulsory for graduate programs to accept IS's if their visa is valid for the duration of the program.
8. An extension of current graduate visa conditions, to take into account the time lost due to COVID.
9. Ensure hiring companies are not allowed to refuse to hire IS's- it may be a rule but there are many companies that do not comply "by using semantics"

Our professional members also felt easing working restrictions, and enabling more access to WIL and graduate programs would assist in keeping Australia competitive as a study destination. Some specific comments from VicWISE professional members "Work integrated learning to be made available to all students" "Remove 40 hours a week restriction for international students" "Wil should be considered learning and not deducted from work hours" in all occupations There was general agreement too that the ability to gain work experience in their field of study was important Some specific comments around this from VicWISE student members: Increase "Post study work rights" Relax post study work rights regulation for VET students Extend 485 visa to 3 years Other suggestions from our professional members they felt would assist in making Australia a study destination of choice into the future were "Reduce annual study load from 8-6 subjects to allow more time for employment" "Easier and more accessible pathways to PR" "Clear and consistent pathways to PR" "Increase points for professional year to 10 points and make accessible to all streams"

Q21.

4 - How can providers, governments and stakeholders work together to achieve diversification opportunities (for example of disciplines, source countries, study destinations and delivery models)? [limit to 500 words]

VicWISE Student responses 'Exchange programs for students who are affected by the travel ban, given the opportunity to attend classes in universities in their country. 1. Enable internship programs and workplace opportunities into governmental entities & and non-profit organisations 2. Labour mobility programs between countries under students visa with employability rights 3. Initiate transnational programs with online delivery and virtual study groups between onshore and offshore students. That could later convert to face to face. Pathway courses in fields where source countries have an equity & equality gap Human resource allocation of the degrees that Australian source countries need Int'l students can act as mediators & representatives of these so it serves both govts. Beyond travel ban; allow international students to get involved in government collaboration with other countries Build deeper connections between education providers and industry, including through enhancing better collaboration partnerships to meet the needs of students. Provide ongoing industry experience & training during study. More labour work exchange program Government should provide firms and companies with better understanding of int. student visa conditions & encourage companies to hire int. students for both jobs and internships. VicWISE Professional Members responses AUS com connecting to offshore student experiences Research on learning outcomes of virtual internships to support continuation of delivery in the future Make WIL more widespread Clear information on entry requirements and equal treatment for all countries. GOVT/IEAA/ AUSTRADE ETC To work collaboratively with uni/ education providers to create: Work experience opportunities, via review of work experience/ laws for international students to open up more access to places More community connections with: - Sports clubs - Service clubs - Welcome dinners - Alumni Build more WIL into courses to enable more access Austrade and VECCI help to utilise students to grow Australian trade opportunities. Govt depts to provide experience/opportunities/ work shadowing etc Mentor programs Encourage grad recruiters to offer mentor programs +WIL for internationals. Get international ambassadors/ academic facilitators to co-teach certain units in VR

Q9.

5 - What are the necessary skills for the future that students should be prepared for? [limit to 500 words]

We surveyed VicWISE professional members and VicWISE student members about this. Our professional members comprise professionals working with international students as counsellors on employment and other challenges. Most professional members cited language as a key skill, while most students cited communication skills as key. This difference in perspective suggests there is an element of communication that students feel is not strictly a language issue. As some students have cited cultural integration as an issue this is perhaps part of the problem. Many ESL teachers know that when you teach language as a native speaker you are also giving indirect lessons in cultural norms. So, for students who have learnt English in their home country perhaps from a local non-native English-speaking teacher there may be little or no clear understanding of the cultural norms and expectations. With our members we have seen the ripple effects of this lack of cultural understanding have mild to serious negative impacts on mental health. Other key skills students felt were important are also reliant on a clear understanding of personal cultural norms and the ability to adapt to the current environment. These skills most cited by students included, time management, organisation, decision making, strategic thinking, networking, interpersonal skills and leadership which requires a coordination of all these skills. VicWISE students also wanted to learn to be adaptable and become culturally integrated as well as specific skills around; • Coding + tech • leading a remote team • Transferable skills • Technical skills the acceleration of digital work and education Students also wanted onshore industry experience and training here because the world will be much more diverse VicWISE professional members comments on what skills international students need Adaptability and flexibility Working with diverse colleagues Good understanding of Australian work culture Networking Emotional Intelligence Self confidence Open mind able to work from Australia +home and anywhere else in the world • a Global mindset • Interpersonal, teamwork & leadership skills • Entrepreneur skills to make social impact • Professional networking skills • Australian workplace culture High English language skills • Language proficiency / cultural awareness (business and social) • Communication/ verbal and written • Career development Proficiency in new technologies • IT esp. MS office Digital Resume skills • Resume coaching • Communication norms • Video/presentation coaching • Creativity • Personal brand workshop (individualism)

Q10.

5.1 - How can Australia improve employability outcomes for international students, ensuring students have the necessary the skills to compete in a globally competitive labour market? [limit to 500 words]

WORK EXPERIENCE This is a key area that international students want more exposure to. Some ways to achieve this include: • Reviewing Fair Work Laws to enable all currently enrolled international and domestic students to complete 12 weeks of unpaid work experience as part of their tertiary study (with clear guidelines) • Government departments being open to international students for internships, mentoring, work experience (and ensure actual compliance) • Provide international students with more information on working in remote and rural locations to help with skills shortages – at the moment is quite foreboding for students to consider these options • Austrade, chambers of commerce (i.e. VECCI)set up schemes to more proactively match international students with organisations that want to harness international students' language and cultural skills to grow their businesses abroad – maybe there is an Australia wide database set up which is open to all Australian tertiary education providers to advertise on their career portals • Big graduate recruiters encouraged to be more open to engagement with international students – consider mentor programs and WIL vacation programs • Running an education program with HR on the various visas to ensure the international talent pool is recognised

Q11.

6 - How do we create a uniquely Australian education experience? [limit to 500 words]

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Students want to feel more engaged with the community and their peers. Some ways to achieve this include: • Increase community connections via sports clubs, service clubs (i.e. Rotary), local government youth groups • Expand Welcome Dinners The Welcome Dinner Project • Alumni welcoming and mentoring new arrivals • Discounted tickets to more community events • Universities being more proactive in running mixer events between local and international students • Assisting new students to understand how their own cultural orientation influences behaviour so they can pivot that understanding out to adapt to the new environment. • Developing genuine peer to peer programs that support international students after 5pm, weekends and public holidays to improve their student experience

Q12.

6.1 - What is our value proposition for both international and domestic students? [limit to 500 words]

Live close to home and develop a Global Mindset. Safe and secure with opportunities for all.

Q13.

6.2 - How do we offer an Australian education experience while complementing the value of Australian offshore and online education? [limit to 500 words]

EMPLOYABILITY SKILL DEVELOPMENT esp. for offshore students • Free online courses / webinars / You Tube clips open to all international students (but esp. pitched at students stuck off shore) which focus on Australian employability skills, Australian culture/ how to fit in and find local friends, communication skills, including some extra assistance with pronunciation, as well as some fun stuff on what to see and do in Australia, some student success stories etc • Global connections program so local and off shore international students can meet up on-line before students arrive – a bit like pen friends of old

Q14.

7 - What else should the Council for International Education and the Australian Government consider in developing a new strategy? [limit to 500 words]

Start tracking outcomes for international graduate students year on year so we can better meet the needs they identify. We can already see that there is a level of dissatisfaction amongst international graduates around the value of the investment. If we cannot create actual pathways to gaining industry specific experience then we are overselling our capacity and there will be blowback. The rise of so-called intern providers is a case in point. This sector has been well supported financially by government despite some dubious situations where the projects providers create for students to "intern" in are either developing their own business with free labour or inventing other projects to attract further govt. grants. The model of an unpaid internship should not become so enticing to business that they no longer want to pay students at all for their time. Perhaps a sliding scale of payment starting from the minimum wage and raised based on experience would help here. Without a clear understanding of cultural norms and expectations many programs just don't resonate with newcomers or locals. The concurrent difficulty domestic students describe around making friends with International students is rooted in misconceptions around newcomers cultural norms. Both local and domestic students would benefit from more awareness and practical strategies in this area. A greater level of interaction between the two groups could create a unique point of difference for Australia. With a solid global mindset and embedded practical strategies as the Study Queensland motto says; all of our students could "Start here", and "go anywhere" successfully.

Q15.

8 - Do you have any additional comments or feedback to share?

Perhaps in the current climate when there are skills shortages, federally funded programs that have contractual obligations to only employ citizens should be allowed to employ non-citizen and under graduates. A win-win for the international education sector and government agencies struggling to meet the demand for skilled employees.

Q19.

If you wish to upload a document to support your submission, including a document answering the discussion questions, please upload it here.

Q16.

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- Yes – publish my submission with my name
- Yes – but keep my name anonymous
- No – don't publish my submission