

Department of Education, Skills and Employment
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

12 May 2021

Re: Response to international education strategy consultation paper

Victoria University welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Consultation Paper for an updated international education strategy. We offer the following comments to the discussion points raised in it.

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

The key priorities are:

- providing a vision for the recovery for the Australian international education sector, including a framework and roadmap for the return of international students to Australia
- increased recognition in policy settings that international education delivers public good benefits and that Australian public institutions should be prioritised in realising them
- the development of a diversification strategy that supports education institutions' efforts to diversify their student profile, including by discipline, study mode and study location
- An overhaul of the post-study work opportunities and migration policy settings that are explicitly linked to national employment and population priorities, and which recognise both offshore and online study in these programs
- explicitly recognising the soft power of international education (including outbound student mobility) and linking policy and investment accordingly
- strategies to reduce the environmental footprint of the Australian international education sector globally.

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?

Supporting students is central to delivering the best possible student experience, including through:

- offering a range of delivery models, including online and as pathways
- Federal support for public VET providers of international education
- delivering successful post-study employment outcomes
- ensuring effective pastoral care, including mental health care
- preparing them to be responsible global citizens
- effective action against low-quality providers.

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

Federal Government support is key to making Australia globally more competitive. This can be achieved through:

- legislative changes to not include work-integrated learning in students' work rights entitlements
- developing a framework that explicitly identifies and links national skills and knowledge priorities to study areas and post-study work and migration opportunities
- supporting accreditation and recognition of Australian qualifications globally, particularly for students studying offshore and online
- greater Australian regulatory flexibility and support for innovative models of transnational and international online education in VET and HE
- consideration of how changes to qualifications and study models (e.g. – microcredentials) will shape the future education and employment landscape for the aforementioned points
- providing COVID-impacted prospective and current students with certainty about post-study work opportunities
- adopting a bipartisan approach which welcomes and recognises the contributions of international students to our broader community – including better collaboration between Federal, State and Territory Governments.
- ongoing top level consideration of education in Free Trade Agreements
- a dedicated Federal Government Education engagement arm that combines all aspects of international engagement (similar to the British Council).

Reviews of the ESOS Act, National Code, and other relevant legislation, need to underpin any effort to retain Australia's global competitiveness.

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

Diversification will remain an ongoing challenge, but can be supported through the:

- identification of national skills shortage areas, particularly in high tech/skilled disciplines
- linking of post-study work and migration options to the identified skills shortage areas inclusion of offshore/online in post-study work/migration opportunities
- introduction of disincentives to reduce "provider hopping" that are linked to post-study opportunities – especially assigning institutional visa risk
- Federal Government initiatives to support consortia approaches to transnational education (especially in VET)

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

Employability skills are central to providing a globally competitive educational experience for all students – domestic and international. This includes (but limited to) skills in:

- teamwork
- leadership
- critical thinking skills, particularly those developed through humanities and social science-related fields
- communication: written, verbal, and non-verbal
- culture awareness and understanding
- ongoing self-development
- entrepreneurial mindset/adaptive behaviour
- technology-related literacy.

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

Providing work-integrated learning opportunities as a core component of qualifications is vital to developing the employability skills that graduates require, regardless whether they are international or domestic students. Benchmarking and tracking the educational and career outcomes of international students should underpin all strategies to improve their employability.

Simplifying the process and reducing the costs for Australian companies of all sizes, including start-ups, to employ international students and/or graduates is critical to improving employability outcomes. Enabling international students and graduates to establish start-ups in Australia is also critical in ensuring that Australia's economy continues to grow.

Developing and executing an effective awareness raising campaign which clearly articulates the benefits to businesses of employing international students and graduates.

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

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

The central tenets of the Australian education experience should be:

- quality of education
- support of students
- educational outcomes
- career outcomes
- a culturally diverse experience
- global citizenship.

Whilst there may be elements that could be enhanced through a uniquely Australian education experience, the underlying value proposition is a global one.

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

Ensuring similar outcomes, regardless of study location, is a critical determinant of the value of an Australian education experience. Global recognition of Australian qualifications, and the provision of a high quality education experience, regardless of location, delivery model, duration or field of education are key.

In shaping national skills and knowledge priorities, consideration should be given to the opportunities available to students who have undertaken an Australian education experience overseas, be this online or through a TNE delivery model.

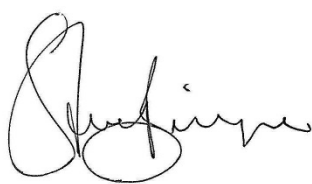
6. *Community support for the international education sector is important for the sector's social licence. How can the benefits this sector provides to Australia be better understood by wider community?*

Federal leadership is required to highlight the benefit international students bring to the Australian community, beyond the immediate financial one. Areas to address include:

- employer engagement about the skills and knowledge opportunity of employing international students and graduates, particularly those recently graduated
- the cultural benefit to Australian society of international students – and migrants more broadly
- soft diplomacy of graduates across the globe that strengthens Australia's global standing, reputation and effectiveness.

I hope these comments are of use. We look forward to working with the Federal Government and its relevant agencies to further Australia's strength in international education.

Kind regards



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