

CONNECTED, CREATIVE, CARING:

AUSTRALIAN STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION 2021 – 2030

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the consultation paper. The objectives of the strategy are supported. Responses to questions posed in the paper focus on specific initiatives that could be led by the Government to support delivery of these objectives.

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

Although this is a ten-year strategy, an immediate priority is support for the return of international students to Australia, working with the States to provide safe quarantine arrangements and signalling to international markets that students will return to Australia as soon as possible.

While acknowledging that public health is the top priority, damage to the sector of the 'Fortress Australia' brand will make recovery from COVID-19 long and hard. The sector needs a consistent, coordinated message, led from the top that 'Australia welcomes international students - stay with us until the borders open'.

The Strategy could also consider how the sector prepares for future waves of global disruption. For example, anticipating further pandemics, a coordinated national pandemic response strategy for international education would better position the government and the sector to work collaboratively towards an optimal balance between public health and sustaining the sector.

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?

The Government could:

- research and profile best practice, what works and why, to help continually lift standards across the sector.
- support the sector to respond to racism on campus - research and profile best practice.
- support the sector to respond to wage theft, promoting fair work conditions, educating international students on their rights and holding non-compliant employers to account. The Government, in collaboration with industry peak bodies could educate employers.

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

The Government could:

- review regulation of online and blended learning, micro-credentials and stackable short courses in countries with competitive offshore offerings, including the UK, and consider changes to regulatory setting while maintaining academic standards and reputation.

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

Delivery models: *'Australia has the potential to be a world leader in online education and the new Strategy is an opportunity to explore innovative ways Australia can expand its footprint including digital delivery, blended learning, micro-credentials, stackable short courses and more, while maintaining our academic standards and reputation.'*

While digital and blended delivery, stackable short courses and micro-credentials will contribute to revenue diversification of the international education, the Strategy over-states this contribution. Revenue generated in competitive offshore and online delivery is not a substitute for onshore student revenue. Australia has a long way to go to become a world leader in very competitive global online and short course markets and Government support to identify and assess opportunities and accelerate growth would be welcome.

The Government could:

- conduct market research on demand, supply, the global competitive landscape and price elasticity for online and blended courses. This will act as a reality check on the strategy's ambitious vision for offshore markets and product innovation, offsetting declines in onshore student revenue.
- advocate recognition of online and blended delivery in countries where this delivery is not fully recognised.

What are the necessary skills for the future that students should be prepared for? How can Australia improve employability outcomes for international students, ensuring they have the necessary skills to compete in a globally competitive labour market?

Industry engagement is key to employability outcomes for international students. Encouraging employers to open graduate programs to international students will improve graduate outcomes.

The Government could:

- lead industry forums on the benefits of employing international students, profile outstanding students and employers; include international student employment categories in industry awards; and
- open government graduate programs to international students, leading by example

Visa settings are important to international student employability outcomes. The Government could:

- consider changes to visas so that students studying offshore through TNE, online or other arrangements, are eligible for Post Study Work visa. This extends provisions introduced during COVID where students offshore with a visa could count offshore study towards the required minimum months to qualify for Post Study Work visa. This would make offshore provision of Australian qualifications more competitive and help providers diversify from onshore revenue.

A detailed understanding of global employment trends would contribute to improved employability outcomes for international students. The Government could:

- work with the sector to lead research on international labour markets and emerging skills gaps, mapped to Australia's education strengths to identify future opportunities
- work with the sector to support international students returning to their home countries to link with alumni networks and Australian industry peak bodies
- work with the sector to offer more internships and placements to international students

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

The Council and Government could consider:

- Strategies for greater cohesion across Federal Government Departments. Alignment of strategic priorities across DESE, Home Affairs and DFAT could help to leverage synergies between skilled migration, visa settings, market diversification, quality assurance, industry engagement, research excellence and the international education agenda. Interagency interaction is not the same as strategic alignment. Recovering from COVID and building for a decade of growth, the sector cannot afford to have government agencies pulling in different directions;
- Strategies to improve coordination between Federal, State and regional international education bodies, which maximise return on investment in sector initiatives and effectively promote the Australian education brand;
- Location of and investment in, offshore international offices to most effectively meet the objectives of the strategy, including market diversification;
- Committing to continued NCP funding and review of the impact of the discontinuation of Endeavour Scholarships; and
- More substantially addressing the research and industry engagement in the Strategy. These are drivers of growth, and while addressed in the consultation paper, are not foregrounded. Initiatives supporting research and industry engagement will help to deliver on the strategy.

