**We present this a separate submission to the Accord as we feel it may be lost in its previous presentation as:**

**Appendix A: from the submission to the Accord by Heller and Leeder – Towards an ethical networked university.**

3. Challenges and opportunities for the higher education system

**The role of international education**

**Discussion document Q43: How should the current recovery in international education be managed to increase the resilience and sustainability of Australia’s higher education system, including through diversification of student enrolments from source countries?**

Responding in particular to the preamble: *International education helps to deepen Australia’s engagement and influence with strategic partners such as the Pacific and Southeast Asia, particularly with priorities like climate change and sustainable development, and contributes to jobs, skills, investment, and industry development in Australia too.*

**The dilemma:**

At more than a quarter of its total tertiary student numbers, Australia has the largest [proportion of international students](https://data.oecd.org/students/international-student-mobility.htm) of any country (other than Luxembourg). Around one half of all master’s students in Australia are international. Fees from overseas students represent Australia’s fourth largest export industry, and the fees have replaced some of the government support to the higher education sector. Hence, these fees are used to cross subsidise both teaching and research in our universities. Students are [encouraged to stay in Australia after graduation](https://www.studyaustralia.gov.au/news/post-study-work-rights-extension-qualifications-announced), hence depleting scarce manpower in their country of origin during and after their education. Education has become a valuable commodity. In addition, there is a high carbon footprint from international students who travel and live in Australia during their studies.

In 2018 [UNESCO reported](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375686.locale=en) the Gross Enrolment Ratio (enrolment regardless of age as a percentage of the population who are in the five-year age group immediately following secondary school graduation) for different countries:

Australia 77%,

East and South-east Asia 45%

Sub-Saharan Africa 9%.

But global inequalities in access to higher education such as these are largely ignored. The selection of international students depends largely on their coming from rich families who can afford to send their children to Australian universities. This does not represent the real global or even regional needs for access to higher education. For example, as a proportion of its home population Nepal has 20 times more international students in Australia than India or Indonesia, and Malaysia has twice as many as Vietnam and three times that of Cambodia, while Africa, the continent with the lowest access to higher education globally, is poorly represented among international students in Australian universities. Population trends which suggest massive future growth among the youth of Africa are also not being taken into account for future proofing the sector’s international offerings. Sustainability is also threatened by the geopolitical vagaries that might influence sources of international students.

So, we have an ethical dilemma – Australian universities are subsidised by rich international parents while global inequalities in access to higher education remain. The very high quality of education that Australia offers is not being used to the best effect globally now or being set up for the future. Countries who send their students to Australia stand to lose highly trained and scarce manpower. This might be termed [educational colonialism](https://johnmenadue.com/neo-colonial-dreams-australia-eyes-the-indian-education-market/).

In addition, the process of bringing international students to Australia creates a high carbon footprint. In a partnership with a UK University, 128 students enrolled in a fully online master’s programme from 70 cities in 30 countries, mostly African. Rather than students travelling to and studying in the UK, [study online was estimated](https://f1000research.com/articles/10-849) to have saved nearly a million Kg of CO2, and [the programme was judged](https://openpraxis.org/articles/10.55982/openpraxis.14.1.150/) to have led to a number of successful outcomes. Among 15 higher education institutions examined in the UK, distance-based education models were associated with an 83% reduction in carbon emissions. Huge changes are occurring in higher education due to the possibilities opening up with advances in information technology. These may assist universities in many ways, including to have a lower carbon footprint. A pivot to the [distributed university](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-16-6506-6), in which education takes place mainly online and in regional hubs, would lead to major reductions in carbon emissions, and we suggest that this could be extended to international students.

**Some examples of innovations in global education:**

The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London has developed a new, third, business model termed [equitable global partnerships](https://www.soas.ac.uk/international/global-partnerships). Their first two models are high fees for international students attending SOAS in person, and a substantial but lower distance learning fee for international students. The equitable partnerships model is education offered in partnership with selected global partners and offered at cost, which is considerably lower than the other two models. It not only allows for lower costs for students, but for collaborations in education and research between the partner organisations and enables the co-development, co-teaching and co-accreditation of academic programmes in a much more integrated way that helps build capacity among each of the partners. Education is more likely to be localised to reflect the experiences and requirements of students in an international setting. This model is a hybrid between online and face-to-face so that both partners make a contribution.

[Learna](https://www.learna.ac.uk/) is a UK educational company currently whose academic awards are validated by a UK university. They have a commitment to [empowering medical professionals](https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/02/09/how-online-learning-providers-are-empowering-medical-professionals-in-some-of-the-worlds-developing-nations/) in some of the world’s developing nations through online learning and is currently working with 361 students sponsored by the Merck Foundation in African nations including Ghana and Zimbabwe, who are studying online Postgraduate Diploma and MSc courses. Over the years more than 120 students sponsored by the Merck Foundation have already graduated from Learna’s medical programmes.

[Peoples-uni](https://openpraxis.org/articles/10.55982/openpraxis.14.1.150/) was a volunteer led fully online educational charity established in the UK (with major Australian input). Awards were validated by a UK and then a UN charter university registered in the DRC. Volunteer expert tutors came from 55 countries, many of whom were university academics or those in a service role. Students came from more than 100 countries (70% from Africa). 159 Public Health master’s graduates, with other gaining a Diploma or a Certificate. Many more students took individual modules or courses for their continuing professional development including 7000 enrolments on the Peoples-uni Open Online Courses site. An active Alumni group produced peer reviewed collaborative publications and a number of Alumni joined as tutors. Cost of the master’s award was GBP 500.

The International Clinical Epidemiology Network (INCLEN) was an institutional capacity building programme established in the 1980s funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Four universities in the North America and Australia offered master’s degrees and research support. Among the original 26 medical schools, a number developed their own master’s degrees via technology transfer. The network continues, led from the Global South and is active in research and education.

These selected examples demonstrate that universities, businesses, volunteers and philanthropists can come together to offer innovative global capacity building examples. We are also aware that Australia does have many committed academics who offer education and research programmes aimed at building global capacity. However we believe that there is a need for the Australian Accord to make some suggestions for ethical Australian led innovations in international education.

**The future:**

We accept that the Australian higher education sector is currently dependent on fee income from international students. However, failure to explore other options risks the long-term sustainability of the sector and does not encourage governments to move towards fully funded research and teaching in Australian universities. We are aware that there are a number of initiatives to secure the overseas student market with delegations to India and elsewhere, but we believe that there should be a sector-wide approach to this issue. With international students comprising more than a quarter of all university enrolments, their carbon footprint is substantial and not sustainable.

**Possible innovative programmes:**

*Network for global online learning.* Australian universities come together to create and support a [network for global online learning](https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=14344) offered at low cost to make it affordable to those at need. The network would include universities in the Global South and so would contribute to their institutional capacity-building (and avoid the dangers of colonising education). This could start with the use of existing online courses but the co-development and accreditation of courses, as well as the development of research partnerships would be a goal.

One idea might be to create a scheme of ‘EduOffsets’, the educational equivalent of carbon offsets until university finances can become less dependent on international student fees. This would require a global perspective of need, a balance between current regional and future global priorities, and the search for partner universities in the Global South. As an initial guiding principle, universities would offer one at-cost place on an online course to ‘offset’ the income they gain from each international student on campus. A philanthropic organisation might be sought to create the infrastructure for the development of the network. The network would be underpinned by educational and collaborative technology.

*Equitable partnerships model.* Here individual Australian universities would partner with international universities as in the SOAS equitable partnerships model. This would also enable the co-development, co-teaching and co-accreditation of academic programmes and lead to research collaborations. As in the SOAS model, it would require the programme to be offered at cost, rather than the current high international student fee level.

*Global online programme(s) led from outside the traditional higher education sector*. Here, commercial or third sector providers would create and offer the programmes, with validation and certification of awards by the higher education sector. This could be funded by the Government through the higher education or international aid budget, or by philanthropy, or it could be funded by the providers in exchange for student fees to cover costs. Features of each of the options above could also be included.

**Need for experiment.**

Some of these ideas, as with other suggestions for university reform, might be the subject of experiment and evaluation.

**Need for data.**

Data on the global needs for higher education, in relation to both Australia’s global priorities and the current provision should be obtained. Also, good longitudinal data on the employment fate of international students.

There are also no good data on the carbon footprint of alternative structures for the delivery of higher education by the sector including for its international students. [CDP](https://www.cdp.net/en/info/about-us), ‘a not-for-profit charity that runs the global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts’ does not provide data on the education sector. A recommendation from the Accord should be to require universities to obtain and publish credible data on their carbon emissions and their steps to reduce them.