



Australian Government

# Council for International Education

## Sustaining Growth and Excellence in Australian International Education

### Introduction

In 2016 the Australian Government launched the ***National Strategy for International Education 2025*** (the National Strategy). Designed for all Australians – the National Strategy outlines a number of goals, which if realised, will ensure Australia's role as a global leader in education, training and research. This paper provides a report on progress in implementing the National Strategy since its launch, outlines the opportunities and challenges we face, and sets the direction for future focus.

### Health of the Sector

Australia's international education, training and research sectors make a significant economic, social and cultural contribution to Australia, to our foreign policy interests and to individual communities. Hundreds of thousands of international students study in Australia every year, and still more students living overseas benefit from Australia's international education offerings through offshore study. In the year to November 2017, there were 621,192<sup>1</sup> international students studying on student visas and over 100,000 students studying trans-national education programs delivered offshore. International education supports more than 130,000 Australian jobs<sup>2</sup> and is Australia's third largest export and largest services export, adding almost \$31 billion to the Australian economy in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

Between 2016 and 2017 there has been growth in student enrolments across all subsectors: International students and researchers continue to bring a cultural and linguistic depth to our schools, vocational institutes, universities, workplaces and communities that help Australians gain skills to thrive across multicultural global environments. People-to-people linkages and networks that develop through a shared educational experience support both trade and diplomatic efforts and create individual connections.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Education and Training, 2017 data

<sup>2</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, *The value of international education to Australia*, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia, Aug 2017, cat. no. 5368.0, available at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/5368.0>

As a whole, the Australian education and training system is world leading. Strong leadership, particularly by industry, ensures Australia continues to have a number of comparative advantages, such as our well established educational pathways from early childhood through to tertiary, our ability to deliver onshore, offshore and online, and our robust quality assurance mechanisms and effective student protection arrangements that are responsive to student and provider needs.

Notwithstanding the broadly favourable operating environment for international education, challenges remain in how we position Australia's school sector to access new markets and highlight the strengths of the Australian curriculum, and in recruiting VET students who are able to be granted a student visa. VET and higher education providers in particular continue to face regulatory and behind the border barriers offshore which constrain their ability to deliver Australia's world class curricula and qualifications in a range of countries overseas. While these issues are being addressed, including through free trade agreement processes, the ability to influence overseas markets to offer a more favourable operating environment should remain a high priority for government.

### **Challenges, Risks and Opportunities**

International education is a highly competitive, globalised sector which is expanding as income, aspiration and participation in education in emerging economies continue to rise. In the 18 months since the National Strategy's launch, there have been dramatic changes in the geopolitical landscape. This change has been catalysed by recent geopolitical events, increased competition and globalisation, demographic shifts and accelerating technological change. The changing landscape has had and will continue to have profound impacts on how Australia delivers international education. While these disruptions present significant challenges and risks, they also offer great opportunities.

To maintain our strong presence in international education, we are starting to plan for the transformation of education in the context of the current digital revolution and rapidly changing global labour market demands. The central challenge for all stakeholders is to simultaneously maintain and strengthen existing approaches while taking a forward-looking view of where the sector needs to be in the long term.

The future of our international education sector depends on us breaking down traditional silos, diversifying our markets as well as our education offerings. We must be open to working collaboratively and delivering education, training and research outcomes beyond existing delivery modes. Working together collaboratively will allow Australia to form world-leading offerings and take advantage of emerging opportunities where a single provider does not have the capacity to meet demand or increasingly reducing price points.

Clear opportunities exist in expanding our VET offerings, both onshore and offshore, and strengthening connections between training providers and industry. Competitor countries

such as the United Kingdom and Germany are already working to develop interconnected industry and training offerings for offshore markets. Opportunities also exist in fully leveraging the expertise of Australian training providers in delivering training for industries that are in high demand in emerging economies, such as transport and logistics, aged care, tourism, civil construction and mining<sup>4</sup>.

As more countries undergo social, cultural and economic change, new opportunities for bilateral and multilateral engagement will emerge. In recent years we've seen growing multilateral engagement between Australian and Latin American students and education providers. For example, there has been 21 per cent growth in ELICOS enrolments from the Americas in the first half of 2017, compared to the same period in 2016<sup>5</sup>.

The schools sector is also an area with significant opportunity for growth. For international students, schooling often forms the first step of an Australian education pathway, with over half of international school students progressing to further education in Australia<sup>6</sup>. Transnational delivery of schooling is also well placed for growth, as recent changes to Chinese private education law have demonstrated, in providing an excellent opportunity for Australian providers to enter the market.

There are barriers that will need to be overcome in order to best take advantage of the opportunities present in the schools sector. International partners are often confused by Australia's schooling system due to its distribution of responsibilities between states and territories and the Commonwealth. We need to stress the quality of the national curriculum that underpins schooling across all of Australia.

Higher education and research perform strongly in Australia's international education offerings, but there is always room for improvement. Australia has some of the best universities in the world with a reputation for excellence in teaching and research, particularly in the fields of astronomy, earth sciences, medicine and engineering. There are opportunities to better leverage of our unique strengths in these areas as the number of students seeking a high quality university education continues to grow.

The international student experience offered by Australia, as perceived overseas, is founded in the four fundamentals of a quality education, a safe and welcoming environment, a great lifestyle and a strong foundation for a career<sup>7</sup>. However recent anecdotal evidence suggests that without greater effort, we risk our ability to continue to deliver on the 'Australia promise'. An ongoing and ever improving understanding of student needs and experience, and ensuring offerings are tailored to meet those needs, will be key to delivering on this promise. Key areas for further focus include:

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<sup>4</sup> KPMG, *The Global Demand for Skills*, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education and Training, 2017 data

<sup>6</sup> Department of Education and Training, *Study pathways of international students in Australia*, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Austrade, *Perceptions of Australia – Market Research*, 2017

- strengthening support services and better access to convenient and affordable public transport, health services and accommodation.
- addressing the view that Australia is an expensive study destination, particularly as competitor countries improve their low cost international education offerings.
- ensuring that international students who study in Australia have the work integrated learning opportunities they need to develop employability skills that will position them well when they begin their careers.
- presenting international students with a uniquely Australian experience during their studies, including through ensuring domestic and international students are well integrated.
- ensuring that education and training delivered by Australian providers outside of Australia is recognised for delivering the work-ready skills that are in high demand in emerging economies.
- continuing to work across government and with the sector to address any instances of exploitation of international students in the workplace.

Working to enhance transnational qualifications and skills recognition will support an increased internationalisation of education and work. We must also ensure that Australia's strong visa policy settings remain competitive and coherent across the education sector.

Currently the majority of international students study in major cities, enriching these metropolitan communities. As our cities grow and infrastructure pressures are felt, promotion of the benefits to students and the wider community of education in regional Australia will open up new opportunities. Regional Australia has education providers and infrastructure with a reputation for excellence, as well as offering a unique community life. Taking advantage of these existing assets will unlock benefits for students, regions and Australia as a whole.

Australia's quality assurance mechanisms and student protection arrangements will need to continue to be responsive to the rapid pace of technological change and new models of delivery, enabling flexibility for providers and students.

Activity in the sector is underpinned by data, including the biennial International Student Survey, the Provider Registration and International Students Management System and collections managed by individual providers. However, there remain gaps in our data collection which if addressed could boost the potential of some sectors, such as data on short stay international students, overseas study tours and sister school partnerships. We must also boost our capacity to analyse and interpret data in a timelier fashion. In an increasingly data-driven world, our success will depend on our ability to quickly and accurately identify what is affecting the sector and respond to it.

## **Delivering on the 2025 Agenda**

The National Strategy has provided a common vision and set the direction for the sector to follow. It has prompted greater leadership and collaboration across the sector and governments, facilitating growth and progress in key areas.

The expert members of the Council for International Education (the Council), whose role is to oversee and drive the implementation of the Strategy and the Australian International Education 2025 (AIE2025) market development roadmap, have started to lay the ground work to build a more joined up approach between government and the sector.

In its first year of deliberations, the Council has sought views across all levels of government and within the sector on where efforts should be undertaken. Based on feedback, expert members of the Council for International Education have determined four key priorities for the short to medium to implement the National Strategy in order to build the base for future work:

- Providing the best possible student experience, including developing employability skills and regional engagement.
- Developing a nationally consistent approach to marketing and branding of international education.
- Enhancing international cooperation through in-country projects, research collaboration, two-way mobility and transnational education.
- Communicating the benefits of international education to the Australian community.

The first round of the Enabling Growth and Innovation project fund has been key to building a firm foundation to deliver on the National Strategy. The first funding round is supporting projects, outlined at Attachment A, the results of which will help to strengthen and grow the sector, enhance the experience of international students studying in Australia, and maintain a strong evidence base to support its ongoing development.

The Commonwealth, States and Territories International Education Forum (CSTIETF) has provided an informal mechanism for all jurisdictions to work together to progress work under key areas of the National Strategy which align with state and territory strategies. In particular, the CSTIETF is working to improve collaboration on student accommodation, the quality of education agents, and incident response management.

### ***National Strategy – Pillar One: Strengthening the fundamentals***

There have been significant advances in effective quality assurance and regulation, particularly recently in the way we can identify and prevent unscrupulous or poor quality

providers from moving into the international education sector or continuing the delivery of services. We've seen:

- The passing of the *Education Legislation Amendment (Provider Integrity and Other Measures) 2017* which will enable the publication of agent outcomes and agent performance metrics.
- Revisions to the *National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018*, which will enhance the safety and welfare of students on campuses and strengthen arrangements for the care and welfare of students under the age of 18, and ensure greater transparency in the information that is provided to international students to help them make decisions about studying in Australia.
- adjustments to the Tuition Protection Service levy, due to the success of the Tuition Protection Service.
- Development of the *English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) Standards 2018*, which now brings all intensive English language courses registered on CRICOS within the scope of the ELICOS Standards.

### ***National Strategy – Pillar Two: Making transformative partnerships***

We've forged ahead in strengthening our partnerships, enhancing connections and mobility:

- Competitive visa arrangements have continued to support the sustainable growth of the international education sector, including implementation of the Simplified Student Visa Framework which has simplified the process of applying for a student visa for genuine students; reduced red tape for providers; and delivered a more targeted approach to immigration integrity.
- Successful pursuit of our international educational interests with our bilateral and multilateral partners continue to position us well.
  - Australia has been a leader in the development of the first APEC Education Strategy that will guide future initiatives and support inclusive growth in our region through its objectives of enhancing competencies, accelerating innovation and increasing employability.
  - Australia has also played an important role in progressing the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications as Chair of the expert drafting committee to support greater consistency and fairness in the way Australian qualifications are recognised overseas, helping to break down barriers to regional mobility.
  - Australia is leading work in the development of an APEC Integrated Referencing Framework for Skills Recognition which has included engagement with ten countries on their systems, showcased the strengths of Australia's system and could lead to increased connectivity.

- The Global Innovation Strategy is encouraging greater cooperation with key partners, and its initiatives are supporting start-ups, research-industry linkages and regional collaboration on shared challenges. The 'Partnering with Australia on Innovation, Science and Research' booklet under the GIS is helping international businesses, research organisations, entrepreneurs and researchers to collaborate with Australia.
- Through signature initiatives such as the New Colombo Plan, Australia Awards Endeavour and Australia Awards, more Australian and international students have been supported to engage in the region and build relationships that underpin future collaborations in research and business.
- The Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy provides a coherent, whole-of-government approach to alumni engagement, working with Australian education institutions to achieve the greatest impact. Alumni engagement initiatives have significantly expanded in all Australia's overseas posts. Alumni initiatives have an increased focus on promoting Australia's world-class education, training and research system.

### ***National Strategy – Pillar Three: Competing globally***

We've continued to promote our excellence and identifying new opportunities for growth:

- To maximise the impact of collective efforts across Australian and state and territory governments and the sector, the Enabling Growth and Innovation funding has been committed to delivering a *strategic messaging framework* to improve the quality and consistency of how Australia's strengths are communicated internationally across governments and the sector, aligning with local destination marketing activity.
- At the same time, we will develop pilot Market Action Plans for Indonesia, Vietnam and Mexico which will trial enhanced coordination and joint-initiatives to maximise Australia's competitive position in these markets.
  - Lessons learnt from these pilots will be applied to other markets in the future.
- Assistant Minister Andrews has run a successful International Skills Roundtable, which has considered barriers to the delivery of VET overseas and to identify where there is potential to build on our current strengths, tailor modes of delivery to international needs and work collaboratively with industry.
  - Through the Roundtable, a VET Engagement Strategy is also being developed.
- The International Skills Training courses, launched in April 2017, enable the delivery of training courses specifically designed and developed for the offshore international student market.
  - These non-AQF courses aim to address critical competency gaps, support skills needs in the global workforce, and provide Australian registered training organisations the opportunity to offer additional products to support

overseas stakeholders to meet their diverse skills needs, such as skills in training and assessment, transport and logistics, tourism, construction and care services.

- The government has also continued to support the internationalisation of the sector through direct services provided to over 580 Australian education and training providers.
- Enhanced information on market opportunities will be shared with the sector through new online tools from 2018 onwards and a resource toolkit to enable partnership and consortia formation in the sector will also be released during 2017.
- Successful major promotions have included Business Weeks in Indonesia in March 2017 and India in August-September 2017 led by Minister Ciobo.
  - In both instances, education was a key element of these programs.
- In 2017, Minister Birmingham and Minister Andrews undertook successful trade missions to India, and Minister Andrews also undertook successful trade missions in Indonesia, Singapore and Sri Lanka.

### **Looking to 2025**

Strengthening the fundamentals, making transformative partnerships and competing globally are at the heart of day-to-day business for the international education community.

Australia is entering what promises to be a period of extraordinary transformation for international education. From now to 2025 and beyond, the Australian international education sector, supported by government as an enabler, will need to drive an ambitious and concrete agenda to maintain our position in the world now and into the future.

With that in mind, the 2017-18 the Enabling Growth and Innovation projects fund will be an open and competitive process to test the market for ways to harness opportunities to deliver on the Strategy.

The focus of expert members will be to galvanise the sector as a whole to address the opportunities and challenges identified in this report. In the next 12 months this will include a focus on the following key areas, which align with their strategic priorities and which align with goals and pillars of the Strategy:

#### ***Ensuring strong student support***

Work will focus on delivering on the 'Australian promise' through examination of current efforts to integrate international students with the broader community during their stay; working across governments to ensure consistent and accurate pre-departure information; and improving international student access to advice, accommodation and public transport.



### ***Achieving a strategically aligned marketing and brand approach***

It is important for Australia's international education and training sector to have a consistently strong brand position against international competitors. Improving the impact of this brand position is possible through a more aligned approach to marketing. Expert members will work across the sector to promote the need for greater alignment and consistency of marketing and branding, leveraging agreed values and attributes.

### ***Preparing for the transformation of international education***

Expert members are keenly aware of the need to plan for the transformation of international education. This will initially involve investigating what industry needs now and in the future, what new markets have to offer and what capacity the different sectors have to meet demand.

### ***Development of a community awareness policy***

Work will be undertaken to raise community and industry awareness of the benefits of international education, particularly in regional Australia. This work will address a broad range of areas, including promoting opportunities for Australian students to study overseas; improving industry understanding of student work rights; and promoting work-integrated learning opportunities offered through university-employer collaboration.

### ***Expert member working groups***

To deliver informed advice to the sector and government, expert members will form short term working groups to progress key areas of work, drawing on the expertise, knowledge and networks of sector experts. In the first half of 2018, two working groups will focus on:

- Ensuring strong student support, focusing first on providing advice about student exploitation
- Branding and marketing, providing guidance and direction on a collection brand identify for Australian international education and working towards greater coordination of destination marketing.

Further working groups will be formed based on revised priorities mid-2018.

## 2016-17 Enabling Growth and Innovation Program projects

Project title and description	2016-17 (GST ex)	2017-18 (GST ex)
<b>Enhancing the student experience</b>		
<b>A scoping study of a 'sharing economy' model for international student accommodation in Australia</b> The study will examine the feasibility of a user review ratings scheme for international student accommodation and make recommendations for future models which could be used in Australia.	\$85,000	\$15,000
<b>Developing employability opportunities for international students by undertaking an audit of work-integrated learning</b> A work-integrated learning (WIL) audit will provide a comprehensive overview of current WIL activity, identifying and categorising various modes of WIL. Through the project, barriers and opportunities to providing greater opportunities to enhance the employability skills of Australian educated graduates will be identified.	\$100,000	-
<b>Council for International Students (CISA) annual conference</b> CISA's annual conference is an important avenue to ensure that international students provide strategic and meaningful input to government and the sector. Funding will support actions towards ongoing sustainability of the conference and of CISA, including diversifying participation in the conference and a forum on the student experience.	\$100,000	-
<b>Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations Conference</b> The annual Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations Conference connects students and recent graduates with today's leaders in academia, business and government. It also fosters long term relationships among young leaders from around the globe. Funding will primarily be used for scholarships and bursaries to support participation in the conference and to highlight the opportunities available in the Australian education system.	\$20,000	-
<b>Baseline data to inform evidence-based policy decisions and to measure progress of the strategy</b>		
<b>Enhanced 2018 international student survey</b> - This project consists of eight sub-projects.		
<b>Data Stocktake and Data Gaps Analysis</b> The project will include a consultation across all education sectors to identify provider perspectives on the utility of existing international education data available and perceived 'data gaps' (including qualitative survey-based data). Project outcomes will inform implementation of the National Strategy for International Education 2025. This project will complement a current process of consultation with state and territory governments being led by the department and Austrade.	\$75,000	-
<b>Onshore English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students</b> The 2018 survey will continue a biennial process conducted since 2010 in which international students across Australia participate in a survey investigating their student experience on and off campus. The survey uses the International Student Barometer, allowing Australian survey data to be compared with data from other major countries hosting international students.	\$70,000	-
<b>Onshore schools sector research</b> The survey will examine international secondary school students living and study experiences in Australia.	-	\$60,000
<b>Onshore higher education and vocational education and training</b> The 2018 survey will continue a biennial process conducted since 2010 in which international students across Australia participate in a survey investigating their student experience on and off campus. The survey uses the International Student Barometer, allowing Australian survey data to be compared with data from other major countries hosting international students (e.g. North America, the UK and New Zealand).	\$210,000	-
<b>Offshore higher education research</b> This survey will investigate the experience and satisfaction of students at offshore locations undertaking Australian higher education programs.	-	\$125,000
<b>Graduate employment outcomes research</b> This survey will investigate the outcomes of international graduates who completed qualifications in Australia. The survey will be undertaken for graduates in selected countries, for example, China and India.	-	\$150,000
<b>International student spending survey research</b> This is a supplementary survey to inform the Australian Bureau of Statistics calculation of export income from international education.	-	\$120,000

<b>English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) all-visa students data collection</b> This annual survey-based data collection involves capturing data about all international students in ELICOS colleges across Australia, including those on visitor/tourist visas, working holiday maker visas and other types. This is important as only 66% of ELICOS students study in Australia on student visas. The last survey captured details of over 50,000 students in 2015 who were not captured in the departments PRISMS data (which only counts student visa holders).	\$45,000	\$45,000
<b>Enhancing international cooperation through in-country projects, research collaboration, two-way mobility and transnational education</b>		
<b>Enhancing international cooperation and regional engagement through the China-Australia Higher Education Cooperation Program</b> The China-Australia Higher Education Cooperation program aims to increase the number of partnerships between Chinese and regional Australian universities, helping to promote regional Australia as a key study destination for Chinese students. The research strengths of Australian regional universities will be promoted along with benefits associated with living and learning in regional Australia.	\$150,000	-
<b>Enhancing research collaboration between Australia and the Americas through postgraduate research student internships</b> Postgraduate research students from the United States and Latin America will undertake a research internship program of up to 10 weeks in Australian higher education and research institutions. Through the internship, students will build collaborative partnerships with Australia early in their research careers, fostering ongoing collaboration between Australia and the Americas. The project builds on the arrangements currently in place with US, Brazil and Mexico, and allows for extension to Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Peru.	\$350,000	-
<b>Raising the profile in China of Australia's excellence in the delivery of English language training</b> The project will investigate the market drivers and conditions to develop a standalone English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS) market with China encompassing both onshore recruitment and offshore delivery. The aim is to collect and analyse relevant data and market information with a view to expanding the breadth of, and diversifying, Australia's China ELICOS market.	\$150,000	-
<b>Transforming Relations with Indonesia through Policy Collaboration</b> Research will be commissioned to help the government in transforming relations with Indonesia through policy collaboration on education and training. The research will identify how Australia and Indonesia can reduce barriers to cooperation, and create new opportunities for Australian providers to help Indonesia meet its education and skills needs. It will also identify where Australia can share expertise in regulating and quality assuring education systems with Indonesia, as its education and training needs change.	\$300,000	-
<b>Strengthening Strategic Engagement with India</b> Research will be commissioned to identify new approaches to strengthen the education, training and research relationship between Australia and India. The research will help Australia's education, training and research institutions to build stronger linkages with Indian counterparts and overcome market access barriers. It will also consider how Australian qualifications can become better known in India, to improve the job prospects for Australian and Australian-qualified Indian students in India.	\$300,000	-
<b>Develop a nationally-consistent approach to marketing and branding of international education</b>		
<b>Strategic messaging framework</b> This project will deliver a new messaging framework for use across Australia's international education and training sector, and by all levels of government. The Framework will improve the quality and consistency of how Australia's strengths are positioned internationally.	\$150,000	\$100,000
<b>Digital experience gap analysis</b> The project will analyse the range of digital channels targeted international students and education providers, how they relate to each other and how stakeholder's engagement with them. The project will document the information currently provided through various channels and identify duplication and gaps. It will make recommendations regarding the future digital and information needs of international education across target markets including how this can information best be delivered.	\$300,000	\$200,000

<b>Market action plans</b> This project will establish a common framework to trial improved approaches to coordinating market development activities across Australian, state and territory governments, peak bodies and providers, in two to three markets.	\$200,000	\$100,000
<b>Communicate the benefits of international education to the Australian community</b>		
<b>Building and strengthening support for international education in Australia</b> This project will build and strengthen support for international education in Australia through targeted engagement with industry and communities, and the development of a toolkit to assist in raising the profile of international education into the future.	\$100,000	-
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>\$2,705,000</b>	<b>\$915,000</b>