



Expert Members of the Council for International Education

Consultation Paper: Growing International Education in Regional Australia

1. Purpose

Australia benefits enormously from the large numbers of international students who choose to study, work and live in Australia. International education contributed \$32 billion to the Australian economy in 2017-18 and supported more than 240,000¹ jobs across the country in 2017. In addition to economic benefits, international education is central to our efforts to build influence with our neighbours, strengthen people-to-people links and build global stability.

There is great work being done in regional Australia to support quality education experiences for international students, and international students continue to report higher rates of satisfaction with studying in those locations². One of the challenges for the sector is how to inform international students of the availability of high quality education, meaningful employment opportunities, and community engagement in regional Australia.

The aim of this consultation paper is to stimulate discussion on how to promote and develop opportunities for international students beyond the increasingly popular study destinations of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

It invites submissions from interested parties on the barriers and opportunities to attract and support more students to study in our regions, and seeks views on innovative and fresh approaches to education and other services which will materially enhance the international student experience.

2. Background

In 2016, the Commonwealth launched its ten-year *National Strategy for International Education 2025*³ (the Strategy), designed to strengthen Australia's role as a global leader in education, training and research. Goal 9.2 of the Strategy highlights the importance of regional Australia to the Australian international education and commits to:

attract more international students to regional communities by promoting internationally the excellence and the advantages of education, training and research in regional Australia.

A priority for the Council for International Education is to look at ways to communicate the benefits of international education across Australia, including identifying ways to encourage a diverse range of study opportunities, including outside of the major capitals.

¹A figure calculated by the Department of Education and Training and announced by Minister Tehan in October 2018: <https://ministers.education.gov.au/tehan/australian-international-education-conference-2018>.

² 2016 International Student Survey data (Department of Education and Training)

³ National Strategy for International Education (2016) p.30

Engaging international students within our regions is also consistent with the Government's commitment to improving education opportunities for regional Australians through its response to the *Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education*.

At the Australian International Education Conference (AIEC) on 10 October 2018, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education, highlighted the many benefits for international students from studying in regional Australia and invited the sector's consideration of opportunities to further grow international education for the benefit of students and Australia's regions.

We want more students to have experiences of engaging with our regions and I encourage you all to think about how we can achieve this.

3. How do we define regional?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Statistical Geography Standard remoteness structure, which divides Australia into five classes of remoteness based on a measure of relative access to services, is used by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training in its international education publications. For migration purposes regional Australia is defined by the legislative instrument *Migration (IMMI 18/037: Regional Certifying Bodies and Regional Postcodes) Instrument 2018*, which includes several capital cities, such as Canberra, Adelaide and Hobart as regional Australia (Sydney, Melbourne and several other larger cities like the Gold Coast and Perth are classified as metropolitan areas). Some states have developed their own definitions in response to their circumstances.

This paper seeks views on how to encourage international students to explore study destinations outside of Australia's major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

4. Benefits from studying in regional Australia.

International education has much to offer regional economies and communities, both through the goods and services purchased by international students, and through the engagement opportunities they bring to Australian institutions, domestic students and local communities by expanding opportunities for global engagement. The economic benefits to regions can be significant. A 2016 Deloitte Access Economics' study⁴ estimated that onshore international students studying and living in the New South Wales region of New England and the North West contributed \$33 million to the local economy and supported 243 full time equivalent (FTE) jobs in 2014-15. It also identified those studying and living in Cairns (Queensland) contributed \$36 million to the region, supporting 273 FTE jobs. This figure is anticipated to be higher when non-student visa holders, such as working holiday makers studying English, are accounted for.

Regional Australia has much to offer international students, by way of a unique student experience, greater community engagement as well as inexpensive course offerings and smaller class sizes. Evidence demonstrates international student satisfaction with the living and learning experience in regional Australia consistently rates highly, and above satisfaction levels for students in metropolitan centres. Data from the International Student Survey 2016⁵ shows that overall satisfaction scores for international students enrolled in a regional institution were 1.6 percentage points higher than metropolitan counterparts in their educational experiences.

⁴ Deloitte Access Economics (2016). *The Value of International Education to Australia*, available at <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>

⁵ The 2016 sample is university, non-university higher education & VET students (excludes ELICOS and schools).

Professor Greg Hill, the Chair of the Regional Universities Network, listed a range of benefits⁶ for international students studying in a regional campus, including a high level of acceptance into the local community, a lower cost of living and less congestion than in major cities. Studying in a regional institution may also mean smaller campuses and class sizes so international students have more opportunity to interact and network with domestic students, lecturers and local communities.

We know that international students are looking for high quality experiences but also value for money. Course prices offered by regional institutions are often more competitive than metropolitan ones. For example, benchmarking conducted for the Australian Government⁷ shows on average a degree (undergraduate and postgraduate) in a regional university is 22% more affordable than a comparative program in major capital city. The Australian Government is currently undertaking comparative research on cost of tuition and living expenses in metropolitan versus regional locations, to better understand the value differential of regional study and inform the future marketing activities of regional communities and their institutions.

Education institutions in regional Australia typically offer specialised courses, including in agriculture, marine science and tropical medicine, supported by world-class research and training expertise. Regional Australia would benefit economically from better demonstrating and promoting these specialised offerings.

To be sustainable in the long term any initiatives to promote studying in regional Australia should reflect the strengths of regional institutions and ensure the benefits engage regional communities in supporting international students.

5. The current situation in regional Australia

Regional Australia has a long history of attracting and retaining international students, including some of the first Colombo Plan students. Regional education institutions offer unique programs supported by world-leading research and training in a range of niche disciplines relevant to a particular geographical location or industry.

Australia's regions were also early movers in the formation of study clusters to promote destinations and attract international students. It is estimated that there are more than 18 study clusters representing regions. A number of these are not-for-profit incorporated bodies that involve shared leadership from the sector, local government and state governments.

Coordinated efforts, such as in Townsville, which bring together education institutions, state and local governments and business leaders are leading innovations in building capacity to support and encourage more international students to choose study locations beyond Australia's capital cities.

Further to this, the Australian Government has been working with states and territories to promote regional study programs and destinations through the Australian Trade and Investment Commission's #GoBeyond campaign.

School education, English language and vocational education and training are also key parts of Australia's regional program delivery. Many regions, including coastal locations like Cairns and Sunshine Coast, benefit greatly from the high numbers of temporary visitors participating in study tours and other non-award education and training activities. Education-related activities undertaken by non-student visa holders is not easily quantified on a region by region basis, but some regions have reported high numbers of learners. Study Cairns, for example, reports that the city hosts close to 30,000 learners each year, whereas in terms of student visa holders it hosted around 2,500 international students in 2017.

⁶Greg Hill (2018), *RUN welcomes initiatives to send more international students to regional campuses*, available at http://www.run.edu.au/cb_pages/news/international_students_to_regions.php

⁷ Austrade and Study Move (2018)

However in 2017 only three per cent of onshore international student enrolments (by student visa holders) were at studying at campuses in regional locations of Australia⁸.

Table 1. Distribution of international student enrolments in Australian capital and regional areas in 2017⁹

State/Territory	Share (%)		Enrolments		Total
	Major Cities	Regional Areas	Major Cities	Regional Areas	
NSW	98.8%	1.2%	292,972	3,585	296,557
VIC	99.1%	0.9%	247,331	2,326	249,657
QLD	94.0%	6.0%	115,605	7,367	122,972
WA	99.6%	0.4%	53,468	228	53,696
SA	99.8%	0.2%	35,657	89	35,746
ACT	100.0%	0.0%	16,910		16,910
TAS	0.0%	100.0%		8,103	8,103
NT	0.0%	100.0%		2,430	2,430
Australia	96.9%	3.1%	761,943	24,128	786,071

Just over 50 per cent of students studying in regional areas were enrolled in higher education. Bachelor or Masters (by coursework) degrees were the most popular level of study for higher education students.

Postgraduate research made up twelve per cent of enrolments in regional areas, compared with six per cent in metropolitan areas. Higher education students in regional areas were more likely to be studying in STEM fields (40% of all enrolments) than those in metropolitan areas (28% of all enrolments).

Similar to the composition of international student intake across Australia, in the regions, China (24%) and India (12%) were the top countries of origin, followed by Nepal (6%), Malaysia (4%) and the USA (4%). China and India together contributed a third (36%) of the total regional enrolments, although just three per cent of all student enrolments from these countries were in regional areas.

Compared with its share of 30 per cent across Australia, enrolments from China are under-represented in the regions, meaning that the sector could explore further the potential to attract these students by optimising course offerings, including short-term field work and group study tours, targeted marketing activities, and work-integrated learning, mentoring and internship opportunities.

Students from the United States had the highest proportion of regional enrolments out of the top ten nationalities represented in the regional areas. Eight per cent of the USA's enrolments were in regional areas. Students from the USA are largely enrolled in short-term study abroad programs and are attracted by high quality institutions and life-style opportunities.

6. The attractiveness of Australia's major cities

The overwhelming majority of international students are currently drawn to large Australian cities, namely Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. These locations offer proximity to high ranked universities and to same-culture diaspora communities, and may be perceived as offering more employment opportunities (both during study and post-graduation).

⁸ Includes all non-Major Cities areas as defined in the Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness structure.

⁹ Department of Education and Training (2018). *International students in regional areas research snapshot*

Testimonials from international alumni of Australian institutions demonstrate the importance of students being able to access the food, the culture and the community networks located in the major cities. Diaspora community networks are particularly important to international students (particularly those with English as a second language), and who are unlikely to be familiar with Australian workplace culture.

A key challenge in getting more students to consider a regional study experience will be how to tackle the perception of lower ranked institutions in the regions and limited course offerings. More work is needed to demonstrate availability of part-time and post-study employment and a broad range of lifestyle options and to promote the unique value proposition offered outside of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

7. Consultation questions

The Department of Education and Training invites views from interested parties on the following issues to help inform government efforts to encourage international students to have a study experience outside the current geographic areas of concentration.

1. How can government, institutions and communities better promote the valuable and unique experience of studying and living in regional Australia?
2. What are the barriers to regional destinations and their education institutions hosting more international students?
3. How can metropolitan and regional education institutions work together to create regional study opportunities for international students in ways that benefit the students, the regional communities and the institutional partners?
4. What are the best ways to communicate the benefits of spending time in regional Australia to prospective international students and their parents?
5. Given the strong interplay between tourism and education, particularly in regional settings, how can government, institutions and the community capitalise on the relationship, map its value and promote regional strengths?
6. What role could fee structures and scholarships, education agent promotions, and changes to government policy settings play to encourage more students to study in regional Australia (e.g. migration incentives)?
7. Is there a need for greater insights into the motivations and the experience of international students in regional areas relative to metropolitan areas, using survey instruments and other targeted research?

Interested parties are invited to submit feedback via www.education.gov.au/submissions-growing-international-education-regional-australia.

The closing date for submissions is **COB 30 November 2018**.