

Organisation: Australian Council for Private Education and Training

Question 1. How can government, institutions and communities better promote the valuable and unique experience of studying and living in regional Australia?

- The term ‘regional’ has negative connotations especially in the Asian region. While we might use the term internally as part of our definitions of rural, regional and remote, for promotional purposes externally other terms should be used to promote a unique Australian country cultural experience with all the benefits entailed, as listed in the CIE paper. The promotion would need to be part of an overall marketing package that promotes Australia as a whole.
- The definition of ‘regional’ is quite broad since it includes capital cities in some states as well as large regional towns. Capitals like Hobart and Adelaide, while classified internally as regional for migration purposes, would not benefit from being considered regional by international students, with the negative connotations they might attribute to this. Again, a whole of Australia marketing package is needed that describes locations according to their positive, diverse features rather than by whether they are urban or regional.
- A whole of Australia marketing approach would require using diverse urban and country images, other than the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Opera House and other popular urban destinations, to promote study in Australia holistically. While iconic images of the Bridge etc are well recognised, iconic images of Australia can also include natural environments that leverage tourist perceptions of Australia as a safe, natural haven, particularly given the increasing air and water pollution in urban cities in the region. These natural environments can be promoted culturally as a natural extension of life in Australia, rather than reflecting a sharp city-country divide, where ‘city’ might be conflated with quality, and ‘regional’ with inferior – which does not reflect the reality.
- A whole of Australia approach would require collaboration and coordination at all levels, since regional providers would not be of the size, nor have the resources available, to promote their institution as large, city-based institutions would.
- Promotion could include the offering of appropriate incentives such as migration and post study work rights in that region for a lengthy period, however, the regional areas targeted would need to have available job opportunities, which many international students depend upon. There would also need to be sufficient work experience placements available, related to the areas of study offered in those regions.
- The agents as influencers are key people to target to promote appropriate positive messages to students. Their feedback could also be sought on this proposal including any intelligence they might provide to support a marketing approach. For example, whether International students already living in rural areas might be more likely to study in the regions rather than urban students and what they might be seeking.
- A clear, value proposition would need to be expressed as quality education and training, the reported high level of student satisfaction rates, ease of transport (including short cheap flights), social and cultural activities, and global connectivity, support services, facilities, high speed internet, culturally diverse foods and diaspora, jobs and accommodation.

Question 2. What are the barriers to regional destinations and their education institutions hosting more international students?

- The (incorrect) perception offshore that regional areas offer a lower quality experience and reduced likelihood of securing high level employment opportunities on graduation

- A smaller number of providers, a narrower range of course offerings and potentially fewer resources, facilities, services and socio-cultural activities, although increasing student numbers would increase viability and enhance resources – positive examples of what's working well would be useful.
 - Availability of employment, work experience placement opportunities and sufficient suitable accommodation
 - Student desire to gravitate to large capital cities where the bulk of students are located
 - Less access to cultural diverse foods and diaspora
 - Difficult travel access and variable IT connectivity
 - Awareness of the range of destination options available and their benefits
 - Agent habitual behaviour in referring students to particular locations and institutions
 - It is acknowledged that the challenges and barriers vary according to location.
- Cooperative partnerships among institutions, employers and local communities, including appropriate matching to suitable destinations, are essential to overcoming most of the barriers listed.

Question 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?

- Urban-country partnerships among institutions could be mutually beneficial but also partnerships between regional institutions and local industry/employers.
- Packaging qualifications to include study pathways involving both urban and regional experiences through school/institutional partnerships among city and country institutions, for a whole Australian experience might be attractive, particularly where some cities have direct links with specific regional areas.
- City-based education providers could negotiate work placements for international students in regional areas, to provide a diverse experience, which would also alleviate the pressure in cities where it is very difficult to find such placements.
- An approach to engaging local communities would be essential for ensuring positive experiences for international students.

Question 4. What are the best ways to communicate the benefits of spending time in regional Australia to prospective international students and their parents?

- Links with tourism agencies and positive images of the regional experience through media and social media.
- Providing opportunities for prospective international students and their parents to experience the regions via study tours with visits to schools and other institutions.
- Graduate and alumni reviews of their experience.

Question 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?

- Raising awareness of the value-add to tourism through student, family and friend visits.
- Tourism agencies need to work together with the sector for cross promotion, which may require a partnership with national and state tourism and education and/or trade agencies.
- Link study promotion to nearby tourist destinations and offer discounts for students living there (and their family) to participate in tourist opportunities.

Question 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)?

- Student scholarships and/or internships would be very successful to kick off a focus on regions.
- Agents are key influencers of student study choices so agent famils in regional areas would be very important
- Visa bonus point incentives particularly for lengthy stays and/or reduced visa costs.
- Extend post study work rights for students who intend to study in regional areas

Question 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 instruments such as the International Student Barometer and/or other targeted research?

- Yes definitely. There seems to be a paucity of solid research available. Some useful information is needed into the motivations and interests of international students to study in other than the currently popular destinations, and what would keep them there on graduation.
- The research should identify those student cohorts that might prefer a non-urban experience, since it might be that students who currently live outside of cities in their own country might also prefer this in Australia.
- The research should also identify the pre and post arrival experiences, level of community engagement and acceptance experienced, support services, cost of living, tuition fee levels, availability of job opportunities, availability of accommodation, pay levels and work placements - required for some courses. There may be a perception of poor job opportunities in regional areas however, there is the opportunity to capitalise on work availability and higher wages in certain industries in some regional areas.
- Research might also track graduate student outcomes and destination studies as evidence that regional study would not disadvantage graduate post study employment opportunities.
- A related issue is that international students seeking work in industries often require completion of a short course (e.g. Hospitality RSA, First Aid, truck driving or heavy equipment operation licence etc). The regulator requires international students to undertake such courses at CRICOS registered providers that may not be located in regional areas. There may be an argument for easing this regulatory requirement when the student is located in a regional area.

Question 8. Any other comments?

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback.