

Organisation: Australian Government Schools International (AGSI)

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

Government schools in all states and territories consistently deliver a life changing experience for international students. Only schools in key regional centres and the smaller cities that best meet the needs of international students are accredited. School sector student preference will vary according to source markets – for example European and Latin American students come to Australia for a study abroad real “Australian experience”, which is what regional Australia offers – beaches, rainforests, the Reef and cleaner environments offered by smaller cities.

Pathway students, who tend to come from Asia, seek details of the areas of expertise of local universities. This needs to be considered when promoting through agents into source markets. For example, the world-renowned marine science expertise at James Cook University in Townsville is a pathway opportunity allowing international students interested in that discipline to be placed in schools in Townsville, Charters Towers and Cairns. The University of Tasmania is ranked fourth in the world for Marine and Freshwater Biology and its association with the Australian Antarctic Division and CSIRO provides a range of potential pathways for students studying in Tasmanian schools.

These examples are not unique as many regional institutions throughout Australia have world-renowned courses which should be promoted, rather than a broader focus on the ranking of the institution itself.

International school students will choose regional areas with good existing infrastructure – airports, public transport, hospitals and larger centres with a variety of options and activities. In regional NSW for example – Wollongong, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle and Armidale all have regional universities, good infrastructure and beautiful environments that attract students and are easily accessible from Sydney.

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

All states have top quality government schools in regional areas and the smaller cities with a long record of academic achievement. Lack of awareness internationally about what regional areas and the smaller cities offer in the school sector is a major obstacle. This especially applies to those regions not as well known internationally as north Queensland and north coast NSW. For example, Tasmania, South Australia, Northern Territory, South Coast NSW and regional Victoria all have high quality government schools and offer an excellent lifestyle.

Accommodation is a barrier in the government schools sector. Homestay underpins the government schools sector and quality homestay availability is universally a challenge in regional areas, restricting the number of international students there. Better promotion of the benefits of being a homestay host is required in a number of regional areas in all states and territories.

English language support outside major cities needs to be improved.

Federal government visa policy of two years for a primary school visa and five years for a secondary school visa is a disincentive to growth in the schools sector.

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?

In the schools sector there are successes in creating linkages in a number of states including South Australia and Tasmania. In Queensland, opportunities to create a genuine outback experience at places like Longreach and Emerald with existing under 18 accommodation options are under development.

However, to develop these opportunities for the school sector, the general lack of under 18 appropriate accommodation outside the major regional centres and smaller cities must be addressed.

The higher education and vocational education sectors need to work with the schools sector to develop integrated exchange opportunities in regional areas for international students. This approach will maximise the opportunity for students and the regions, while potentially creating additional pathways for school sector students to further their studies in regions.

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

Student testimonials, stories and experiences are the best way to promote the benefits of studying in regional areas. All AGSI member states and territories have a wide range of student video testimonials on their respective websites.

Regional destination videos promoting local areas and facilities, the environment and unique attractions are also valuable tools. Most AGSI members use these tools, which are available on AGSI member websites. International school sector students also target on line links to pathway institutions and their course material.

Communication tools including campaigns need to be accessible and usable by education agents. School study tours in regional areas could be targeted for information provision to encourage study tour participants to return as pathway school students or direct into higher education or vocational education institutions in that region.

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?

“Education tourism” which in the school sector includes study abroad and study tours, has a successful record in regional areas over a number of years. This, in part, reflects the high quality education available in government schools in the world-renowned tourism regions of Queensland and NSW. However, this high quality education offering is also available in the smaller cities, in particular Adelaide and Hobart, and in regional areas in all states and territories.

Local community buy in is vital to ensure the anticipated student experience in regional Australia becomes reality for every international student.

Better coordination of marketing effort across all levels of government including message, target audience and frequency will assist in maximising international student numbers in regional schools.

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)?

Discounted fees in the school sector does not work in some regions. In NSW, this did not work but in Queensland, regional study abroad fee discounts did work, for a time. However selling the lifestyle and academic benefits of studying in specific schools in regional areas is a successful formula. For example far north coast of NSW and north Queensland.

As already stated, it is essential to work with agents in promotion of regions.

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 – but the government schools sector already has access to a range of student insight material. It is vital to understand the key drivers for a student’s decision on destination. This needs to move beyond the broad-brush assumptions – for example Chinese students going to cities to pathway to G8 universities and European and Latin American students seeking an experience. All states collect data from their students on these key drivers.

Question 8. Any other comments?

Nil