

## **Organisation: Australian Local Government Association**

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

Local governments are frequently a key source of information about local lifestyle, events, community groups etc, via their websites as well in Council-produced tourist information. It is recommended that communication campaigns to promote international education opportunities in regional Australia include links to these materials and media.

It is also recommended that material be produced and provided to Councils for inclusion on their own website to specifically invite and promote education opportunities, in applicable multiple languages, as local governments are unlikely to have the additional resources available to produce this material individually. A nationally consistent set of communication materials, key messages, templates etc would be favourably received and more easily added to a Council's existing collateral.

Videos inviting international students (and educators) to come to the region are also recommended. Mayors, existing international and domestic students and educators, as well as local industry leaders (ie linking through to job opportunities for students and graduates), may be pleased to participate.

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

Housing availability/affordability, and suitable types of housing for students (and educators) are an issue in some regional areas. Travel distances to/from campus facilities, combined with less public transport options in many regional areas, can also provide barriers. As such, access to information about transport (bike paths, buses etc) and housing options/locations, as well as proximity to entertainment and shopping areas, are key issues to address early in a strategic effort to attract more international students.

Employment opportunities for international students are a known barrier in regional areas. As suggested above, engagement with key industry leaders via video messages, may encourage students and other employers to see the opportunities and benefits of employing international students, both during their studies and post-graduation.

Over time, as numbers of international students grow, another barrier may be the capacity of existing transport systems, as well as support services like childcare, health care providers etc, to deliver services to a growing population. (These services also need to be provisioned sufficiently to meet cultural and language requirements from the early stages of growing international education). As such, long term strategic planning is required, with input from local governments.

ALGA also wishes to highlight the following commentary included in its 2018 State of the Regions Report, which speaks to some of the challenges of building a knowledge economy outside of key metropolitan areas:

#### **Stylised Fact Seven**

Australia's difficulties in adopting the knowledge economy would be eased if knowledge-economy jobs could be decentralised.

The OECD study by Ahrend et al. (2014) suggests that a doubling in city size is associated with a productivity increase of between 2 and 5 per cent. National Economics has identified links between urban employment density and productivity and examined the empirical relationship between metropolitan-wide productivity and city size finding productivity gains towards the high end of expectations. In face of these economies of agglomeration it has proved very difficult to spread knowledge-economy employment away from the city centres, though there has been some decentralisation to inner metropolitan suburbs (particularly when they share the walkability of the city centre) and some to regions with attractive lifestyle options. Further decentralisation is likely to be incremental – from metropolitan centres into inner suburbs and into regional capital cities which have already established themselves as outposts of the knowledge economy. It will require infrastructure support, especially investment in telecommunications and transport to build new economic opportunities and resilient intelligent communities.

**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 association with local governments, metropolitan and regional education institutions are encouraged to consider regional study tours to be built into metropolitan-based study programs. Such study tours may include award and non-award programs and study awards, in order to appeal to and encourage more students (and educators) to learn first-hand the opportunities in regional Australia, as well as enable those students and their educators to pass their knowledge onto local communities.

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

As mentioned previously, video messages and multi-lingual web-based materials, such as via local government websites, are recommended communication pathways. Should resources be available, sponsored visits to/from regional Australia and key international student target markets are another pathway. Promotion in airports and cruise terminals are also suggested, along with advertising in airline magazines.

**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?**

As mentioned previously, promotion in airline magazines, at airport and cruise terminals, as well as using Council-produced tourism materials are all opportunities to promote regional education opportunities to international visitors.

Welcome packs with a free SIM card would be very likely be a popular promotional item, with trackable data potentially captured to track key destinations and movement patterns. The Tourism Tracer app as developed by the University of Tasmania is already capitalizing on this opportunity. <http://www.utas.edu.au/latest-news/utas-homepage-news/new-app-to-help-tourists-share-their-journeys-around-tasmania>

Such information would be valuable to local governments as well as education partners, to inform facility and service development, upgrade requirements etc.

**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)?**

The consultation paper highlights that the standard of education is very high in regional Australia, enrolment costs are financially more competitive, and there are also benefits of lifestyle and/or lower costs of living than in metropolitan areas. As such, regional Australian education facilities and promotions/policy settings should not be focusing on a discount approach to attract more students, but rather they should be promoting the strengths and benefits listed above.

**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?**

Information collected through surveys and other targeted research would be of interest to many Australian regional local governments to help better understand and plan for growing international education opportunities.

**Question 8. Any other comments?**

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission in response to the consultation paper concern growing international education in regional Australia.

The information contained in this submission reflects consultation with State and Territory Local Government Associations. It does not, however, replace the individual views of those bodies, some of which may have made separate submissions during the public consultation process. As such, the information contained below should be considered as supplementary information.

ALGA is the national voice of local government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the country.

In structure, ALGA is a federation of state and territory local government associations. ALGA was established in 1947 and throughout its history has been closely involved in issues of national significance affecting the local government sector as a whole.

ALGA also liaises with key Australian Government Departments, industry peak bodies and community interest groups on an ongoing basis to ensure local governments are well informed and their interests considered in policy and program development.

ALGA is generally supportive of the context and issues raised in the consultation paper in that it reflects the opportunities for regional Australian communities to grow economically, socially and build knowledge capital in regional centres, as well as help ease growing resource pressures in the key metropolitan areas of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane which traditionally attract the majority of international students.

In the 2018 State of the Regions Report “Trade, Jobs, Growth and Inequality” (commissioned by ALGA), the following observation is made:

### "Stylised Fact Three

Successful knowledge-based regions have a high concentration of highly skilled global knowledge workers, such as scientists and engineers. These workers tend to migrate to regions with a wide variety of cultural and lifestyle choices.

The economies of agglomeration operate strongly to raise productivity and incomes in knowledge-based production located in the major metropolitan centres. The productivity benefits arise from human interaction, not only in offices and laboratories but in cafes, shops and educational and recreation venues. These interactions occur most intensively when workplaces and other venues are within walking distance of each other, and preferably also within walking distance of residential options.

This said, not every city centre worker wants, or needs, to live in a city centre high-rise; neither do those who patronise the cultural and entertainment options of city centres need to live on the spot. Commuter transport systems are therefore important but should not detract from the walkability which is the sine qua non of a knowledge-based region. Their capacity should be proportional to the size of the knowledge-hubs which they serve.

Similarly, not all jobs are suited to location in knowledge-based regions. Broad-acre and freight-intensive industries are particularly unsuitable. However, many such industries depend on knowledge inputs and contribute most to economic growth when they are connected to knowledge-based regions both by telecommunications and by convenient passenger transport."

Although reference is made to workers in this observation, much of this commentary may also apply to international students, particularly after graduating. It also applies to the educators required to teach incoming international students.

ALGA thanks the Council for International Education for the opportunity to provide its views on these matters.