

## **Organisation: Charles Darwin University**

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

CDU enjoys a close working relationship with both the Northern Territory Government and City of Darwin Council, recently exemplified in the Darwin City Deal, announced on 16 November. The Darwin City Deal is a major partnership between the Australian Government, the NT Government, Charles Darwin University and the City of Darwin that will have as its centrepiece a major education and civic precinct in the Darwin Central Business District. This precinct and the concept of relocating selected parts of the University most appropriately located in the social and cultural hub of the NT to the city centre is intended, in large part, to make living and studying in Darwin more attractive to international students.

Once the infrastructure proposed under the Darwin City Deal is nearing completion, expected to be 2023, effective promotion of what Charles Darwin University and the Territory can offer to international, and national domestic students, will be critical to ensuring that this excellent opportunity for study in a regional area is widely known. CDU is and will continue to undertake its own international marketing and promotional campaigns to attract international students now and upon completion of the Darwin City Deal, however government, at all levels, has a role to play beyond financial contributions in promoting regional places of study in Australia, through their foreign relations and diplomatic networks throughout the world, and in building foreign awareness of and confidence in the excellence of Australian regional education institutions.

In addition, there are always opportunities to further leverage local community and cultural groups and businesses and employers in the engagement and support of international students. Extension of support and incentivisation of innovative strategies to engage and activate communities and businesses in the international education industry would be welcomed.

Consistent and specific messaging around the benefits of our region is needed to ensure that international markets are aware of what the NT, and more specifically CDU, has to offer and the advantages of studying in a regional city like Darwin. There is significant opportunity to leverage the recently released Boundless Possible NT campaign (<https://boundlesspossible.nt.gov.au/about>) and with some slight adjustment, turn this campaign into one that is highly relevant to an international student audience.

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

Given that a majority of international students travelling to Australia are from large cities, they often have a preconceived idea of what a “regional city” looks like and has to offer when associated with similar “regional” cities or towns in their home country.

Regional study destinations in Australia can also often be less associated with the diaspora communities that can provide international students with important cultural support, accommodation opportunities, and opportunity for casual work. This is, however, not the case for Darwin, which historically has a very diverse, multicultural community and strong cultural connections to many Asian and European countries compared to many other

Australian regional centres. This is feature of Darwin that international students could be made better aware of.

There may also be the perception that employment opportunities for international students both during and after their studies are greater in large urban cities than in regional centres. While this may be true for some Australian regional universities, CDU rates in the top five Australian universities for graduate employment and salaries. Darwin is a city with high demand for service industries related to tourism and hospitality and therefore has great opportunities for casual student employment.

A further barrier may be the unintended consequences of successful tourism campaigns depicting outback Australia's deserts, wide open spaces, wild places and extreme adventure. These images can create negative perceptions about regional Australia in potential international students, who are largely highly urbanised and who, along with their parents, are looking for a safe, well connected, multicultural, and cosmopolitan study experience. In CDU's case the message needs to be made to international students that we are located in a small but vibrant Capital City on the doorstep of Asia, rather than emphasising our perceived regional nature and location.

**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?**

CDU would be very interested in collaborating with other Australian and international institutions on programs that introduce international students to regional Australia, and on programs such as Study Abroad, short-term study programs and research collaborations that could be centred around regional Australia's unique experiences and study expertise. As the only university based in the NT, CDU could be a focal point for enabling students to experience some of remote northern and central Australia they see on tourism promotions, while also introducing students to the facts about the NT's vibrant, modern, multicultural Capital City Darwin and centres like Alice Springs.

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

There needs to be a consolidated and consistent positioning of regional study destinations that dispels any preconceived ideas that parents and students may have. The development of rich content and assets that visually engage and profile cities such as Darwin as a vibrant, cosmopolitan and connected Capital City of Australia is critical. Short promotional videos that give an accurate, attractive visual and auditory overview of the reality of regional cities like Darwin and the facilities and opportunities that are available there are probably the best way to communicate the benefits of regional Australia. Spoken testimonials of alumni are also a powerful way to convey what sort of experience a prospective international student might have in a regional setting like Darwin. Printed materials do not have the same impact. Collaborating with government tourism agencies to produce these assets makes sense and they must be targeted at both the students and those of influence in their lives including parents and agents. Agents must have ready access to these assets.

There is also an ongoing need for recruitment agents to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of Australian cities outside of Sydney, Melbourne and to some extent Brisbane. We have found that their personal experience through study tours, professional development

conferences, and familiarisations can play a significant part in ensuring that agents are communicating a consistent and well-articulated message about the benefits of living and studying outside the major cities.

A good way to do this would be to attract large agent and international education conferences to cities in regional areas, for example the ICEF International Education Agent Conference, which was hosted in Cairns in 2017 and will be hosted in Darwin in 2019.

**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?**

There is great opportunity to leverage the relationship between tourism and education and the investment in tourism campaign development can, with some modification, be aligned with international education. It is however important to leverage but not oversell aspects of the regional experience that may act as a deterrent to international students and their parents as touched on in Q 2 above.

**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)?**

Government policy settings that relate to both part time work and post study work rights are important decision factors for many international students. Anything that can be done to enhance both perceptions and reality of suitable and relevant work opportunities would enhance the attractiveness of regional Australia. Moreover, aligning regional workforce needs with international student study and post study work opportunities that encourages students to move to and settle for a period of time in a regional centre beyond just the term it takes to secure permanent residency would be beneficial. Incentivising students to stay in a regional centre beyond their study period and graduate visa period provides the time for students to establish roots and engage with the community. Post study job opportunities are critical for an incentivisation program to be successful.

Education agent promotions are also critical. We have found that agents have a preconceived idea of what a regional city like Darwin is like and when they travel to and experience Darwin in person, everything changes. Having said that, it continues to be a challenge to then encourage and educate a prospective student and their parent that a regional centre and institution is the right fit for them. If we want to make it easy for the agents to know and understand the regional study opportunities (beyond migration) then we need to provide them with clear messages and visual assets that allow them to showcase and back up their recommendations/advice to students and their parents.

**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?**

The decision factors and influences and drivers of international student choice is well known and there is existing data that could be utilised (with the approval of regional institutions) to better understand motivators and drivers of choice for students in the region.

**Question 8. Any other comments?**

On a more general note, it is also important that Australia change the tone of messaging about the economic value of international students to Australia's economy. This can easily be turned into a perception that Australia is hungrily milking the "cash cow" of international students. This is not a smart message to foreign governments in times of political change and uncertainty.

Australia would do well to talk up the immense social and cultural contributions international students bring to our already multicultural communities. The value of the skills they achieve through our education and training could be harnessed in regional towns and communities – something critically important to Australia's future as a country contributing in partnership to a vibrant Asia-Pacific.