

## **Organisation: Education Consultants Association of Australia (ECAA)**

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

The Government of Australia, Institutions and Communities could strengthen their role in promoting study and living in regional Australia by tertiary education by the development of:

A Comprehensive Regional Education Strategy (CRES) sponsored by the Federal Government, that gathers together the key social, economic and educational stakeholders who will collaboratively help develop a policy framework to guide the development of a promotional strategy. The aim of this strategy should be to:

Build “Brand Recognition” of regional areas through marketing activities

According to statistics, location is one of the most important considerations for overseas students when choosing a study destination. However, not all students prefer capital cities as many students prefer to study in an environment that more fully represents the country to which they want to travel. Regional environments are therefore popular, however, it is difficult to find information about them online, especially in the native language of the students.

#### a) KOL's

- For overseas students, internet marketing is the most effective marketing method. In online marketing, the influence of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) has become increasingly important, especially in the Asian market. Whitley notes that “firms located in China believe that developing a KOL strategy is essential to growth for three key reasons: 1) KOLs can drive faster awareness than traditional marketing tactics, 2) they also help strengthen the brand's image as it benefits from the endorsement of the KOL, and 3) it can often deliver (when effective) much better results at a fraction of the cost. Importantly, firms are highly focused on driving immediate, fast awareness and there are few marketing efforts that can achieve the degree of relevant awareness in China that KOL programs can. Below I share three examples of effective KOL programs.”<sup>1</sup> So, identifying and inviting KOLs to the regional areas to enjoy their unique experience and style first hand and then posting their views through social media channels is good for building awareness. Many KOLs in China have more than 10 million followers, and they can be contacted via agents.

#### b) Student exchange/Study Tour programs

Each year hundreds of Chinese secondary students come to Australia on combined study and cultural tours. These students are usually partnered with an Australian secondary school, so these tours combine time with local students plus trips to tourist destinations in capital cities and often these students visit University campuses. Most students on these study tours have a clear intention to study overseas. and many of them will naturally feel more familiar the study tour destinations and therefore consider studying in these locations, provided the experience has been a positive one. Building a government-initiated study tour program will help to recruit future students. NSW Government has a program which is a good example.

The CRES would bring together Regional city councils, schools, universities and KOL's to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimberlywhitley/2018/01/13/if-kols-arent-part-of-your-marketing-strategy-you-need-to-read-this/#72edc54951a6>

develop packages for secondary study tours. The Regional City councils could provide an overview of activities, the schools could provide student to student contact activities and potentially provide (paid) homestay through the parent network, the Universities could make regional campuses available for tours and the KOL's market this with schools in China. This will raise the awareness and positive aspects of studying in regional areas.

Federal and State Governments would need to co-operate in providing a framework for this to occur.

Local Communities through local bodies can-

- Make the community Ready and aware about the benefits of having international student in the community and the needs they will have
- Providing Homestay or other accommodation.
- Support the educational institutions by making international students welcome at local community events and celebrations.
- Provide information about possible part-time and full-time employment.

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

There are a number of barriers to studying in regional Australia. These are

- Lack of awareness. Students simply don't know enough about the regional cities and the lifestyle in those cities.
- Perceived lack of support services. There is a sense that regional destinations do not have the educational, recreational, medical and other services that the capital cities offer. Aligned with this are factors relating to the local economy such as availability of part-time employment opportunities
- Emotional and sociocultural issues. Studying overseas without a connection through language to the home culture can be frightening and lonely. The capital cities generally provide a "home" community to socialize with. Students are more likely to choose a study destination where they already have friends or classmates, or a University club or support service to assist them meeting people. There is a role for Regional Councils to play
- Lack of high-quality universities. Apart from the ranking of the University, students will choose an institution based on its profile, success and standing. For example, the University of Western Australia and the University of Adelaide are Group of Eight institutions, but their exposure in overseas markets is much less compared with University of Melbourne and University of Sydney.
- Lack of preferred courses. The regional campuses do not offer as wide a selection of courses as on their main campuses in capital cities.
- Fee structure is the same for regional campuses as for city-based courses.

### **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?**

Universities currently spend a lot of resources on marketing their products in international markets. They meet with students and parents at education fairs, roadshow events and by visiting schools. At each of these events, the Universities can emphasise the quality of their

regional programs and make them attractive to students.

Along with staff promoting Australian education and institutions, these events should take tourism and trade representatives who can promote regional tourism, Australian culture and values to students and parents, who will then be more comfortable in sending their children regional Australia. It should be remembered that parents have a great influence in the decisions about educational destinations.

International parents place a lot of emphasis on the credibility of sources of information. Websites containing material authorised and branded by State and Federal authorities will carry enormous weight in Asian societies. Information should also be written in the language of the home country.

The use of education agents to recruit international students is becoming increasingly common around the world, to the point where agents are driving significant proportions of international enrolments in some countries including Australia. Agent's promotional activities have a significant value in promoting the Australian education institutions, specifically in regional Australia. Since they make a living from commissions by referring students. An incentive-based scheme where they received more for regional referrals would also provide a reason for them to highlight the benefits of studying outside the capital cities. Additionally, Education agents should be given training and campus tours of regional institutions.

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

The educational institutions can have a significant effect on regional opportunities.

- i) Metropolitan and regional education institutions can enhance co-operation and introduce joint degree programs which will give students the experience of the benefits and opportunities of both metropolitan and regional cities. Joint pathway structures can provide opportunities. For example, students could study a required English course in a Metropolitan campus but complete the main course in a Regional campus. Another possibility is completing a 2 year Diploma course in Regional and then a subsequent Bachelor's degree in a metropolitan setting.
- ii) Institutions should broaden the fields of post-graduate studies and research in regional areas, forming research and development partnerships with local communities, industries and business organizations so that the research benefits the local community as well as the students.
- iii) Institutions need to highlight the potential contribution of tertiary education institutions to regional and local economic and social development. These include the creation of more jobs by graduates in regional area, especially for engineering and technical students, the possibility of graduating students buying property in regional area, the creation of internships in farming to generate ideas and promote local produce to export markets. A critical mass of international students can make more innovative Arts and business incubation projects viable to encourage students to start their own business and engage with the community.
- iv) Institutions can run Articulation Programs (2 years city +2 years regional, or 3+1 etc.)
- v) Short term summer schools (University students come to Australia to study for one semester to receive credits)

**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?**

Tourism and Education do feed off each other. Successful graduates will encourage others. Parents of students in Australia will visit them and positive word of mouth will encourage travel. If there is generally held positive view of a country it will benefit all areas. The Australian Government already invests in tourism campaigns and Federal and State Governments are actively involved in attracting tourists and have offices in targeted countries. Victoria has been very active in this activity and it has paid off in the number of tourists and students who come to the State. Using existing structures, marketing campaigns targeting Education, both at secondary and tertiary levels, can be developed and be related to tourism. For example, using successful former students as can be used as promoters of both lifestyle and opportunities in Australia and encourage others to take up those opportunities and enjoy the lifestyle.

It may be possible to establish a separate specific organization like Education USA, British Council or DAAD in countries from where majority of international students come to Australia. This organization can promote Australian education, especially regional institutions by various promotional activities with partnership of regional institutions of Australia. Along with promoting Australian education and institutions, this organization can promote regional tourism, Australian culture and value. In that way, international students and their parents will be more comfortable to learn the benefits of spending time in regional Australia and their engagement with this organization will make significant change in promoting regional cities.

**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)?**

These factors play an enormous part in student decisions about where to study. Migration incentives are the most effective and efficient way to boost the numbers of international students. For Australia, as Sydney and Melbourne are such strong performers in attracting international students, it is challenging for the regional areas to build competitive advantages from a quality or attractiveness perspective in the foreseeable future. However, migration incentives will be the most effective driver for students to choose to study in the regional areas. Tasmania is a good example. However, due to limited places assigned for 190 nomination positions, it is hard for state government to balance the supply and demand. We recommend an increase in the quota for 190 state-sponsored places.

Government Policy settings could be changed in the following ways:

- Some courses, such as Accounting, IT and Engineering can be awarded an extra 5 points on Skilled Migration requirements if they study for a minimum 2 years in a regional campus.
- Simpler immigration application process if the student study in regional area for level 3 countries.
- Extra courses especially popular ones such as Business or 4 years degrees such as Engineering, Architecture, Psychology, get be awarded migration points if studied regionally.
- Provide free public transport or concession for international student in regional area, which mean more rapid and frequent on public transport.

- Provide more incentives to study in TAFE courses. Because TAFE courses are cheaper than University course it will allow students greater flexibility. Also awarding 5 Migration points to students if they study Diploma Courses in TAFE institutions in regional Area.
- Abolish the Professional Year Study requirement if students to a whole course in a Regional Area.
- By Studying a Master's degree in a Regional campus, a student can attain 3-year Post study visa instead of 2 years.
- Working Holiday Visa holders can extend their duration of their visa and convert it to study visa if they stay in Regional area.
- Government should give tax deduction or lower tax if institutions establish or open campus in regional area.

Institutions structures and scholarship opportunities have a great influence in international education market. Comparatively lower tuition fees and available scholarship opportunities will encourage international students to study in regional Australia.

- Pricing is a most sensitive issue so give a 25% -30% discount to tuition if they study in Regional areas, including English language students.
  - Targeted scholarships specifically for courses in regional campuses.
- Other steps institutions could take include:
- Provide help in finding the accommodation and jobs as part of student service help for its students
  - Provide More security to study at late night on regional campus such as library access or better security and free shuttle bus around the campus.
  - Build better accommodation in the campus area for international students with cheaper price and similar facilities.
  - Provide activities for international students and promote diversity and introduce international atmosphere
  - Provide Smaller class and extra help for acknowledge weaker students
  - Create better package offers or pathways to the main course by reducing the deposit to attain the COE.
  - Provide more courses that attract for International students with shorter duration such as CPA extra online subjects included in the course.
  - Ensure regional campuses have up to date technology.
  - Ensure an easy commute from Regional main station to Airport.

**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, we believe there is a need for more comprehensive and insight research into the motivations and the experience of the international students in regional areas relative to metropolitan areas. Overall, the relative magnitude of financial versus social issues is difficult to ascertain and is ultimately a personal and subjective matter for students. But by investigating their experiences and motivations we can gain an insight into how to develop regional markets. Understanding the psychology of offshore students is crucial for making policies to promote international education. Surveys and research should be conducted in the primary student source countries to assist the government in policy making.

This activity would best be managed by the CRES already proposed in Section 1.

**Question 8. Any other comments?**

About Education Consultants Association of Australia (ECAA)

ECAA was established in August 2010. Its missions include:

- Promote the profession of Australia education services to overseas students from all of world.
- Work with educational counsellors and agents to develop standards of professional practice and ethics.
- Engage with international students, education providers and governments.
- Maintenance of sound practice and the promotion of the interests of the Association and of the industry and for the prevention of dishonourable practices.
- Welcome all those who wish to practise education consultants.
- Operates as a national branded organisation.
- Meets members' knowledge needs.

ECAA is committed to improve the whole wellbeing of the education export industry, our services include but not limited to:

1. Create a bridging function between education providers and agents;
2. Invite guest speakers from the government, universities, and other stakeholders to hold seminars to our members;
3. Provide instant market intelligence and clients feedback from our industry to education providers;
4. Formulate submissions to government bodies to promote education export;
5. Hold all member meeting on a regular basis to discuss the healthy development of education agency industry;
6. Appeal to the international students to only use ECAA accredited agencies