

Organisation: Government of South Australia

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

There is a need for a new nomenclature, to move away from using the word 'regional'. Using the word 'regional' is problematic for several reasons. First, the term includes large town centres as well as cities such as Adelaide. The second is that the term 'regional' can portray a negative destination image such as small, non-cosmopolitan, fewer facilities, less people, and more expensive travel to. A new marketing message that does not explicitly use the word regional is required to mitigate this.

There is a need to clearly define and articulate what a regional experience encompasses and the value this provides students. Focus the value proposition on reflecting the decision-making drivers of students, rather than trying to convince students to value other elements more highly. Highlight how regional areas can fulfil the education and lifestyle needs of students with the offering they have.

The value proposition could include the following:

Students still have access to the same quality of education provided by institutions in the three big cities. This would require strengthening the messages around quality and the role of TEQSA/ASQA and the AQF. Many students are from countries where there are significant differences between institutions in terms of quality. This is not the case in Australia which if anything is characterised by a 'sameness' when it comes to the type and quality of educational provision. Students in regional destinations report higher levels of satisfaction, as referenced in the consultation paper.

Regional universities and other education providers operate in the same manner as city counterparts with excellent internet connectivity, student facilities and research facilities. Some students use rankings as an indicator of quality institutions. To shift the discussion for regional areas the focus can be on discipline specialisation and niche course offerings, often closely connected to the industries within the region.

Regional universities offer students the best of both worlds – global connectedness while studying at top-class institutions and closer connections with local communities. Students potentially have greater access to local students in regional classrooms and communities.

Regional areas generally offer a lower cost of living. Beyond the face value of these savings, this has a flow on effect for students wellbeing, potentially allowing time for study and 'downtime' rather than working long hours or more than one job to afford their living expenses.

There can be an emphasis on connectivity across Australia. Adelaide is a one-hour flight to Melbourne, which is shorter than many people have to drive to work in Sydney and Melbourne. The perception of distance and access needs addressing in the marketing messages.

The process for promoting these destinations requires strong coordination and consistent

investment. Regional education institutions do not usually have the same level of resources as major city institutions so will find it difficult to compete, even in raising awareness, without collaboration and resource support. All levels of government need to collaborate and align. Education institutions within each jurisdiction also need to reflect the same messages in their marketing and recruitment activities. Platforms for this promotion could include testimonials, consumer messages, specific campaign activity and activation's within the destinations' communities to enhance their offering.

Promotion by itself, however, will need to be supplemented with targeted policy changes to incentivise students to consider regional study destinations. These are discussed under question six.

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

Awareness is the most important barrier to overcome. Without awareness of a destination there is limited options for increasing the number of international students at the destination. Agents and parents need to have destinations in their consideration set, with linked positive associations, to drive growth. This is difficult when competing with hundreds of other cities and requires sustained investment. Cities like Adelaide will always be at a disadvantage on the global stage when compared with Melbourne and Sydney and the level of brand recognition they carry. In addition to this, the level of resources available to regional jurisdictions is usually far less than those of their big city/jurisdiction counterparts, particularly when you include the investment made by institutions.

Beyond awareness of a destination there are also preconceived notions of what a regional destination provides. There is perception that the education may be inferior in a regional city or that there may not be as many work opportunities both during and post study. A barrier for regional destinations is the draw of larger cities for students. Students often preference a 'big city' experience and seek the personal prestige that comes from studying in a world-renowned city. The large presence of both international students and certain migrant groups (from countries that are large source markets for Australia) also act as a 'pull' factor – the comfort of knowing a friend or family member living in that city.

Specific barriers will vary according to location, for example accommodation, strength and depth of education offering, travel expenses. Similarly, access to part-time work and work experience may be limited in some regional areas and act as a disincentive to prospective students.

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?

For higher education and VET the issue is of less relevance to a city such as Adelaide which has very few regional campuses. There are, however, opportunities for city based education providers to negotiate rural placements for international students studying a profession such as teaching, nursing, social work.

For school aged students there is more scope but it would require building up the infrastructure and capacity of regional schools to accommodate international students, which would be a longer term proposition.

A campaign to engage local communities would be helpful as community support is critical in ensuring international students have a positive experience. Best practise case studies would be a desirable aspect to any campaign work.

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

Exposing prospective international students and their parents to the regions would demonstrate firsthand the benefits and dispel negative assumptions. One way to do this is to increase the number of short-term study tours that include visits to a regional campus or school. This would build familiarity with these places in the initial destination consideration stage.

Make strong use of alumni of regional areas – both to communicate the benefits of the destination to prospective students and to activate alumni chapters in their home countries to raise awareness. Additionally, highlight job opportunities available in regional areas, both part time during study and following graduation.

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?

Firstly, continue to build a strong relationship between the respective agencies at national and jurisdiction level to allow for cross promotion opportunities.

Encourage tourism agencies at all levels of government to acknowledge international students as a key contributor to the visitor economy. Jointly identify target segments that will mutually benefit both sectors and potentially pilot campaign activity in a source market agreed between Tourism Australia and Austrade. For example, Working Holiday Makers are likely to be one of the segments studying English on a visitor visa; what are the ways to encourage this to occur in regional areas?

Possibly encourage regions themselves to actively promote education opportunities in their national advertising especially in cities such as Melbourne and Sydney – highlight that onshore international students are a target segment.

Highlight that regional Australia offers proximity and access to some of Australia's best tourism experiences to international students. Activate tourism initiatives such as tourism showcase event, travel and tour discounts for students, aligned to their academic calendar. Create mechanisms for international students to be an ambassador for regional areas to their visiting friends and relatives. Offer incentives and align activities to known times of high volume travel such as orientation and graduation times.

Highlight the number of domestic/international visitors to each region. This can create the impression that these are desirable destinations and drive further visitation.

As an industry, tourism is likely to be one of, if not, the largest employers of people in regional areas. Are there particular areas of labour shortages within the tourism/hospitality sector that international students/graduates can fill both temporarily and as a pathway to permanent migration, which in turn supports population growth in regional centres. To

encourage international graduates to consider working and living in regional centres, local communities need to embrace and support them.

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)?

Regularly monitor visa refusal rates for regional areas, across all sectors, compared to those of the three main cities.

Incentivise students to study in regional areas through the use of bonus points. Students who have studied in a regional area for 2 years currently get 5 bonus points toward skilled migration. This could be increased to 10 bonus points for 4 years study in a regional area. Post study work rights for international students who study and commit to living in a regional area, including Adelaide, should be extended. This may include extension of the rights to university undergraduates (minimum of three years study in South Australia), masters degrees (minimum of two years study in South Australia) and for Vocational Education and Training (VET) diploma students (minimum of two years study in South Australia). This extension could be up to four years for undergraduate/masters degrees or up to three years for VET students. The extension of post study work rights would allow students to obtain the necessary work experience to obtain a regional migration pathway, particularly employer sponsored pathways.

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. There appears to be little research on this and few examples of successful practice. There needs to be a greater understanding of the key drivers for choosing a regional destination specifically as well as pre and post arrival experience. It would also be valuable to have insight into students' access to employment to address perceptions of there being 'no job opportunities' in regional destinations. Tracking graduate outcomes of students who have studied in regional areas could give great comfort and confidence in choosing to study in a regional area.

An area of potential strength that would be worth understanding through market research is the community engagement that international students experience in regional areas.

Question 8. Any other comments?

The response to the consultation paper Growing International Education in Regional Australia is made in the context of 'regional' being destinations outside of the Australian capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane as per the paper's reference in section three. The definition of regional is wide in scope and covers several cities and regional centres within states. There is a great deal of variation across this landscape and it is therefore critical that there is no one-size-fits-all approach when marketing regional destinations. Adelaide, for example, is more comparable with the eastern state's capital cities than with regional centres in Victoria, NSW and Queensland. It has a strong record in attracting international students, has multiple universities and VET providers, public and private, and all the necessary

infrastructure that provides international students with one of the best learning and living environments in Australia.