

## **Organisation: Independent Higher Education Australia (formerly COPHE)**

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

In Higher Education the choice of study destination is largely influenced by international rankings of institutions, which are largely determined by research output and reputation. Other student outcomes should also be promoted, especially employment and the quality of teaching and learning, as in the QILT data.

Many regions already have strong local ethnic communities and a history of welcoming diverse cultures, reflected in the quality of affordable homestay and other accommodation; these attractions need continued promotion, with actual case studies and testimonials. Identifying market countries that have a demand for graduates from fields of education that are well suited to Australia's climate and geography that can be attracted to these niche areas of study would assist in targeted marketing and promotion activities. Other countries in the Asia-Pacific and beyond have need for qualifications in tropical medicine, agricultural studies, and other subjects offered by providers in regional areas. Significant job opportunities could also exist in certain countries in these areas. The benefits of studying in these subjects in regional Australia in terms of the locational advantages of being in the appropriate climate and geographical location could be better promoted.

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

- Perceptions and familiarity; people have heard of Sydney and Melbourne, but not smaller cities and towns
- Lack of knowledge of opportunities and advantages of living and studying in the regions
- Expectations of better employment opportunities, during and post study, and larger diaspora communities in the major cities
- Historical trends, influence of word of mouth, friends and relatives who have gone before; this is still reflected in the marked state/city differences in source countries, which can be traced to the early days of promotion and recruitment
- A lack of promotion of the diversity in the Australian Higher Education sector
- A lack of resources and support offered to independent providers in regional Australia who have much to offer in niche fields in order to effectively promote themselves internationally and build the necessary relationships to create viability around increasing international student numbers
- In higher education in particular, the perception of status and quality associated with global rankings; the GO8 universities are located in the major cities.

### **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?**

Metropolitan and regional institutions could form networks to share curriculum, especially online courses (within the constraints of the National Code) and facilitate student exchanges, especially during normal recess periods, and which might include work experience. The difficulty might be in identifying benefits to the metropolitan institution. Rather than creating an environment where the tendency is to compare different providers, the sector would

benefit from a promotion of the merits of studying in different fields in different locations at different providers. Creating a focus on the points of difference and working on synergies and cooperation across providers in metropolitan and regional areas and not on competition would advantage the whole sector.

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

Apart from the usual promotion channels, including social media and digital platforms, an effective and sometimes under-valued mechanism is two-way student mobility. Some of our best ambassadors are our own enthusiastic domestic students.

Existing study tours in schools and ELICOS should be promoted, including to regions. Most universities have well developed student mobility programs, supported by the New Colombo Plan and Endeavour Scholarships. There is opportunity to build more institutional partnerships and mobility programs, including in some of the niche fields of the independent higher education sector.

**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?**

The new Nation Brand will present a unified message. In promoting the benefits of education and tourism to both the visitors and local communities, emphasis should be placed not only on the economic benefits, but also the cultural and social enrichment. COPHE believes this will have a positive impact on the promotion of the sector by presenting a coherent message. The promotion of the benefits of a holistic education, including the cultural literacy and social development provided through that education, that Australian Higher Education Institutions can offer would also assist in the promotion of regional strengths. Mapping the value of an Australian education at a provider in a regional location in the context of this broad holistic approach that also advocates for diversity in the sector would capitalise on those relationships.

Creating opportunities for higher education providers to work with the tourism industry and creating relationships between institutions, their communities and government through forums and the creation of networks would allow the development of understanding and allow the sharing of insights between these groups.

**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)?**

Scholarships are used as a promotional tool, especially in developing markets, within cost limitations. The provision of scholarships should not be allocated to providers but rather based on the student's location of study. Isolating specific providers that are able to offer government funded scholarships does not allow the diversity and equity in the higher education sector that should be valued by all involved in the sector.

Education agents are key decision influencers in many markets. Better regulation of agents and the establishment of policies that encourage the promotion of the diversity in the Australian Higher Education sector would be supported by COPHE.

Promotional visits can be quite effective, especially if co-ordinated at a regional rather than

an institutional level, given the investment required. Using government offices would allow greater opportunity for a diverse range of providers to engage with these promotional visits. This would benefit the sector as a whole, as the diversity of Australian higher education would be on display to potential international students and it would broaden their exposure to the different options open to them when studying in Australia.

The General Skilled Migration Points test already rewards study in a regional or low growth area. There are integrity risks with a too close nexus with migration, and reputational impact with sudden policy retractions, as demonstrated by past skilled migration policies.

Creating policies that “punish” students for studying in the major cities would be problematic. Providing incentives and working through a program to increase the effectiveness of the promotion of regional areas would be an approach that COPHE supports. One area worth considering is a measured extension of duration of the post-study work 485 visa to regional areas, although this would require appropriate monitoring and enforcement.

**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?**

While COPHE recognises the difficulties in capturing data about international students, particularly after they have returned to their home countries, where more data can be gathered, it would be encouraged that the government seeks to gather it. More data is needed to develop a deeper understanding of international students’ perspectives and the draw cards for those who do choose to study in regional areas. There would also be the opportunity for the data to provide evidence for the government to make policies decisions around the promotion of education in regional areas and to gather anecdotal evidence and testimonials to use in its promotional activities.

**Question 8. Any other comments?**