

Organisation: Independent Schools Queensland

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

International education has been supporting government initiatives and marketing campaigns at national, state and local levels over the last twenty years. Experience invariably shows that the most successful are characterised by high levels of stakeholder engagement and support. International students and their families are our most important stakeholders in international education, and it is important to first understand, and then align any promotion of study destination with a clear understanding of their motivations for and concerns about living and studying abroad.

Other stakeholders in international education include all levels of government, and span all sectors - public and private – in education, business, services and the wider community. In smaller communities, supporters of international education are often closely interconnected or networked. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of personal relationships and niche areas of specialisation can be key factors in developing, managing and implementing collaborative endeavours. In-depth and inclusive consultations at a local level are critical to identifying these unique opportunities, fostering “ownership” of strategies and projects, effective collaboration, meeting expectations and achieving agreed outcomes.

While the Collaborative Marketing Framework

(<https://internationaleducation.gov.au/International-network/Australia/InternationalStrategy/Council%20for%20International%20Education/Documents/Collaborative%20Marketing%20Framework.pdf>), recently developed by the Expert Members’ Marketing and Collaboration Working Group, provides a useful, higher level approach to market prioritisation and consistent messaging across jurisdictions, there are some key messages about regional study experiences that providers in those locations wish to see included.

For example, an independent school in the Wide-Bay Burnett area of Queensland has provided feedback to ISQ emphasising the importance of sending clear messages that education throughout Australia is quality assured by the same regulatory bodies. These regulatory bodies monitor and enforce educational standards in capital cities and regional locations alike. A strong message that regional study locations are great places for families to experience a different lifestyle, study and gain first hand practical experience in hugely diverse environments is vital.

This school also commented:

The smaller communities in regional Australian towns and cities allow for communities to better connect. This connection and the sense of community that grows from it is appealing in today's disconnected world.

This messaging is not dissimilar to the Regional Universities Network (RUN) media release of 20/09/18 (http://www.run.edu.au/cb_pages/news/international_students_to_regions.php):

The smaller campuses and class sizes in the regions mean that international students have more opportunity to interact and network with domestic students, lecturers and local communities, to build career and life skills. Regional communities, businesses and universities benefit from these international links in both the short and long term.

Messaging about student experience, lifestyle and benefits of being outside large metropolitan areas is also important. Students who have only ever lived in a large city may be pleasantly surprised by the safety, friendliness and cost of living and studying in a regional institution.

A collaborative approach, led by local government, vocational and higher education providers or regional development agencies, could thus identify and promote region-specific opportunities along with study pathways and work experience or internship opportunities, for example, in areas such as tropical biology and medicine, mine safety, sports management, viticulture, agriculture and animal husbandry techniques, environmental science, tourism or hospitality.

The most effective channels for promoting key messages include “word of mouth” endorsement of positive, first-hand experiences. The impact of personal testimonials can be optimised by institutions, local governments, businesses, community groups and organisations working together to “package” and promote such experiences, for example, by:

- regularly featuring students and their families in local press / media and tourism photo shoots (with digital versions to share with friends and family)
- creating a library of visual images (digital, print or video) of students and their families in local settings, involved in activities showcasing experiences the region can offer (playing sport, at social events, trying something new, volunteering, having a picnic or barbeque, at the beach, on a farm or property in the outback, in a rainforest, etc..) that can be used by local stakeholders without infringing privacy or copyright restrictions, and
- publishing “authentic” student testimonials delivered in person or via electronic media for different audiences at home or abroad.

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

Barriers to attracting students to smaller study destinations are many and varied, but not insurmountable. Some possible barriers and potential solutions are below.

BARRIER: Local communities are unaware of / do not appreciate the benefits international education can deliver.

SOLUTION: Institutions can partner with local and state governments, community clubs and local businesses (Chambers of Commerce, service clubs, sports clubs, arts groups, church groups, etc..) in demonstrate the economic and social benefits of international education and opportunities for global engagement. International students and their families can be active contributors to this process.

BARRIER: Stakeholder groups may have limited capacity to support students and their families who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

SOLUTION: Community hubs / volunteers with appropriate skills/experience can welcome and help support social integration and language skills (if needed) of non-working dependants of international students at tertiary institutions, student guardians of overseas school students, etc. International students and their families can share their aspirations and insights into their cultures as part of this process.

BARRIER: Information for prospective students about accommodation options is limited or there may be a lack of appropriate or affordable accommodation options for prospective students and families .

SOLUTION: An audit of accommodation stock would be a starting point to identify gaps in capacity. Local accommodation providers (real estate agents, landlords, homestay / motel / boarding house providers) could contribute to an online, easily updated database or directory of available accommodation options, perhaps with a rating system or legend that provides information about inclusions, conditions and costs students for to compare when researching

study destinations.

BARRIER: There is limited access to safe and affordable transport at all times.

SOLUTION: Local transport providers and councils could work together to make this information easily accessible, as well as to identify and remedy services and gaps in services available.

Institutions / local businesses might take an entrepreneurial approach to creating their own solutions to service deficits, e.g., to establish a share ride service run by local students for international students, or a car pool roster for families to access local services.

BARRIER: Smaller providers might have limited expertise or experience in developing a viable and sustainable international education program.

SOLUTION: Larger institutions could lead partnerships with local and state governments to provide professional learning and resources for staff of smaller providers, based on a “think global, act local” approach. Ongoing training could cover a range of areas including compliance, marketing and recruitment, student support, etc., and would aim to develop capabilities as well as mitigate against loss of knowledge because of staff turnover.

BARRIER: A detailed analysis of the collective study offerings of a region and the “niche” opportunities that could be leveraged by a strategic plan developed through collaboration between different stakeholders may be lacking.

SOLUTION: Larger institutions could take a lead in partnering with local and state governments and smaller education and other providers to map education opportunities in detail, identify “niche” areas for collaboration and promotion - for example, school to university and career pathways in a relevant discipline or vocational area.

BARRIER: There may be inconsistent or unsuitable messaging by local authorities and organisations about regional offerings for international students.

SOLUTION: Agencies with responsibilities for regional development could collaborate with key stakeholders to develop consistent and fit-for-purpose messaging about benefits of living/working/studying in that area for the target audiences with different cultural backgrounds.

Most barriers to attracting international students and their families to locations outside the current geographic areas of concentration can be addressed to some degree with goodwill - abundant in regional communities - and a collaborative and innovative approach, supported by all levels of governments through targeted resourcing, capacity building and co-ordination.

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?

There is potential for co-operation between regional and metropolitan institutions to partner in mutually beneficial ways, as in the schools sector, where metropolitan schools have co-operative arrangements with indigenous or remote schools.

In international education, some examples might be:

- A city institution might co-host a study tour group with a rural or regional institution or tourism provider to provide a different type of experience.
- Schools with homestay programs might arrange vacation arrangements for students enrolled

in regional boarding schools.

- Regional businesses and / or farms might partner with metropolitan and local institutions to provide paid work and residential accommodation for adult students during semester breaks. There are also opportunities for businesses and organisations in areas outside metropolitan areas to provide work experience or internships for overseas students studying in higher education institutions in niche study disciplines in agriculture, aquaculture, viticulture, marine science, tropical or rural medicine, tourism, hospitality, etc., and in RTOs in trade and vocational areas.

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 best way to communicate the benefits of spending time in regional Australia to prospective international students and their parents is to have international students with a positive first-hand experience to do this for you.

Agencies with responsibilities for promoting international education should consider strategies that showcase experiences from a range of visa holders who utilise education services locally – for example, student visa holders, visitor visa holders undertaking short term studies as individuals or in groups, secondary exchange students with a student visa, working holiday makers studying in short courses, and school age dependants of other temporary visa holders who are enrolled in local schools. Graduates with post-study work visas might also be happy to advocate the benefits of spending time in areas outside metropolitan areas. Some of channels for promoting and communicating benefits are outlined above under Question 1.

If it were possible for LGAs to facilitate an extension to post-study work rights or a simpler migration pathway for those wishing to remain longer term as contributing members of the community in a manner - similar to the process ACT has developed to assess nominations for a Skilled Nominated (subclass 190) visa

(<http://www.canberrayourfuture.com.au/portal/migrating/article/skilled-visa-act-190-nomination/>), this might be another way regional communities could promote benefits of spending time in regional Australia to prospective international students and their families.

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 interplay between tourism and education should certainly be explored in any study destination. However, the full range of opportunities can only be mapped and exploited if all relevant stakeholders are at the table to map who can best contribute to promotion and service provision, and to assess risk of offerings identified.

Study tour groups commonly visit local attractions and participate in tourism activities as part of a visit program. However, other ways of collaborating might be explored. For example, a school might be able to provide a study experience for a group of children whose parents are participating in short course a offered by another education or activity organised by a tourism provider. Increasingly, study tour groups are looking for areas of specialisation. Locations with niche offerings or unique environments are well placed to meet this demand.

Some of the factors that should be considered if combining tourism with education, for example, in a strategic or risk analysis, include:

- Age of students / visitors
- whether participants are under 18 years or over 18 years,

- If under 18, whether there are accompanying adults from the home country.
 - Language proficiency of students/visitors.
 - Type of visa and length of stay, for example:
 - a visitor visa allows studies for up to three calendar months
 - a working holiday maker visa can be extended under certain conditions if work in a specified area is undertaken in a regional area of Australia
 - a student visa can be granted for up to five years, or two years for primary school students, but noting that
 - ♣ a primary visa holder must be enrolled in a CRICOS registered institution, but school age dependants can be enrolled in any school;
 - ♣ a parent / approved relative of an under 18 student may apply for a student guardian visa and is able to study part time
 - Source of enquiry
 - direct or via and agency.
 - Availability and capacity of third-party service providers.
- However, there are ways outside leveraging the tourism - education relationship that governments, institutions and the community can collaborate to build sustainable international education programs. These include:
- creating opportunities in institutions, forums, events or social settings to listen to and amplify student voice,
 - leveraging marketing opportunities that arise from local government sister-city relationships, trade missions, familiarisation visits, etc.,
 - “adopting” students or family members for a time, and
 - inviting student and their families to events and activities throughout their stay, not just one-off “welcome” events.

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)?

Incentives of different kinds can all play a role in attracting students to a course or community, but sustainability, vibrancy and growth of regional international education offerings must be underpinned by experiences that meet student expectations and deliver high levels of satisfaction– otherwise there is no point.

One strategy might be for institutions to offer incentives for students to return or to extend their stay for a longer period after a positive, short term experience. Incentives in this case might be used to encourage students to “experience” a regional institution before deciding to stay longer.

Incentives for education agents who have studied, lived or worked in regional areas might also be a useful marketing tool to support recruitment campaigns in their home countries. If communities can successfully attract, embrace, integrate and support international students, it should not be a surprise if students and host communities seek ways of prolonging the experience. Visa policy settings and possibly migration incentives could provide further levers to enable international students and their families who wish to make an ongoing contribution to a community and to stay and make it their home.

For small private providers in any location, regulatory burden and cost to become registered on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) and to maintain this registration can be a significant disincentive to enrolling overseas students on student visas.

ISQ is pleased to note that this issue was acknowledged in the Senate Select Committee on

Red Tape Interim Report Effect of red tape on private education

(https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Red_Tape/PrivateEducation/~~/media/Committees/redtape_ctte/PrivateEducation/Interim_Report/report.pdf) in response to submissions by the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) and other peak bodies:

Some submitters and witnesses argued that there are regulatory differences between the public and private education sectors which result in a greater regulatory burden on private providers. ... For example: ...

ISCA highlighted the need for each private school to be a registered provider under the ESOS Act, compared to education departments whose single registration covers all public schools in their jurisdiction; (p.21)

Non-government schools comprise more than 30% of the CRICOS registered providers in Australia and are normally individually responsible for CRICOS registration and compliance whereas State and Territory Departments of Education holding one provider code can benefit from economies of scale, centralised recruitment procedures, policies, exemptions to Entry to Market Charges and the risk rated component of the TPS levy.

Regulatory burden can be especially onerous for schools, which are already highly regulated, as they are subject to two layers of regulation under state and territory as well as commonwealth jurisdictions for CRICOS registration. As noted in ISCA's submission:

[There is] no mechanism or agency oversight to ensure consistency of application of ESOS regulation across states and territories. Previous [attempts to streamline] ESOS have yielded some small results after long periods of consultation and effort but have generally advantaged other sectors to a far higher degree than schools ...

... international education as an area in which that [one size fits all] approach has inadvertently and adversely burdened schools, discouraging them from entering or expanding into the international education market. (p.18)

Some flexibility in policy and legislative settings that make it simpler and less costly for small providers in regional areas to become CRICOS registered and able to enrol overseas students would be a welcomed and practical means of enhancing regional diversification in international education.

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?

This could be the first question in this paper, before questions about promoting experiences, etc., are considered.

Whilst there is research into why international students choose regional destinations over metropolitan and their satisfaction with this experience, there is a need for research that is location-specific.

For example, to what degree does a relative's location and word of mouth of a family friend influence students to choose to study in a particular study location? To what extent is there awareness in a local community about opportunities to engage with overseas students, where student come from, what they are studying, work rights attached to student visas? While some of these questions may be superficially covered in international student surveys, the statistical sample may not reflect student responses in individual locations.

It would be also useful to compare:

- destination choices of students under and over 18 years in different sectors (for example with CoEs for schools sector, ELICOS, VET or Non-Award courses, and

- the relative importance of commonly identified drivers, such as “quality of research and teaching in particular fields”, “quiet lifestyle” and “being safer” for choice of destination compared with region-specific attributes.

Question 8. Any other comments?

ABOUT INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS QUEENSLAND

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak body representing Queensland’s independent schooling sector which comprises more than 200 schools operating across more than 240 campuses.

These not-for-profit schools are a vital part of Queensland’s education system, educating more than 120,000 students, or 15 percent of Queensland’s school-age population.

ISQ’s core mission is to promote, support and develop independent schooling in Queensland, including supporting schools to engage internationally.

About 40%, or 86, of Queensland’s 205 independent schools are CRICOS registered to offer programs to international students on student visas.

The number of international students studying in Queensland independent schools has been trending upwards in recent years, with about 1,800 international students recorded as studying at 72 Queensland independent schools at the start of 2018, according to 2018 State Census data. This is an increase of 6.5% since 2017 and 37% since 2015.

ISQ analysis of Commonwealth Census data reveals, in 2017, independent schools catering for overseas students were distributed across 20 local government areas (LGAs) in Queensland, with 86% of students enrolled the LGAs of Brisbane City, Gold Coast City, Logan City and Ipswich City. A further 7% of students were enrolled in Townsville City and Cairns Regional Council LGAs, leaving the remaining 7% of overseas students distributed across 12 other LGAs.

ISQ has engaged with government of all levels to support independent schools and non-government schools more widely to develop and enhance international education programs since 2003. ISQ regularly participates in international education summits, conferences and roundtables hosted by the Queensland Government, Australian Government - including by the Department of Education and Training (DET), Austrade, the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) – and municipal authorities, the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), ISANA and other industry peak bodies and organisations. ISQ contributes to national and state international education forums and strategies, collaborates with other sectors and Study Queensland to deliver professional learning events for education agents and school advisers of international students and supports non-government school participation in 10 of the 12 regional study cluster groups that are supported under Trade and Investment Queensland’s innovative International Education and Training Strategy, a pillar of which is regional diversification.

ISQ’s comments on the consultation questions posed by the Expert Members of the Council of International Education in the Consultation Paper: Growing International Education in Regional Australia are based on expertise from long experience of supporting, working with and advocating on behalf of independent schools across Queensland.

ISQ’s response to the DET’s invitation for views from interested parties on the issues to help inform the Australian Government’s efforts to encourage international students to have a study experience outside the current geographic areas of concentration are provided in responses to the questions above.