

Growing International Education in Regional Australia

Navitas Position Paper

December 2018

Navitas offers the following key points for consideration by the Council for International Education, relevant federal, state and local government agencies, the international education sector and related industry sectors regarding how to growth international education in regional Australia.

Key considerations

Definition and language of 'regional'

As a leading global education provider – and one that has a substantial presence in Australia, including beyond metropolitan Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane – Navitas is keen to explore, test and leverage ways to grow the number of international students outside of these major cities. Our university partnerships include many campuses outside the three major metropolitan centres of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane:

- James Cook University – Townsville and Cairns campuses
- Griffith University – Gold Coast campus
- University of Newcastle – Callaghan campus
- Western Sydney University – Parramatta campus
- University of Canberra – Bruce campus
- Deakin University – Geelong Waurm Ponds and Geelong Waterfront campuses
- La Trobe University – Bendigo campus (in discussion)
- University of Adelaide – Adelaide campus
- University of South Australia – Adelaide campus
- Curtin University – Bentley campus
- Edith Cowan University – Mount Lawley and Joondalup campuses
- Charles Darwin University – Casuarina campus

Navitas' Careers and Industry Division also has campuses beyond Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane:

- SAE Creative Media Institute – campuses in Byron Bay, Adelaide and Perth
- Australian College of Applied Psychology – campuses in Adelaide (and soon in Perth)

Navitas believes that 'destination diversity' is the objective of policy and programs that aim to promote 'regional' study options. For this reason, Navitas suggests that in international education, all levels of governments, providers and other stakeholders adopt a definition of 'regional' that is 'non-major metropolitan'. Meaning, all areas beyond the metropolitan centres of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane would be included in 'destination diversity' policy, programs and initiatives.

It is then useful to determine tiers and accompanying descriptors within 'non-major metropolitan', for example:

- Tier 1 – Outer metropolitan (e.g. Western Sydney etc, etc.)
- Tier 2 – Other capital cities (Canberra, Hobart, Adelaide, Perth and Darwin)
- Tier 3 – Major regional cities and towns (e.g. Bathurst, Ballarat, Toowoomba and Launceston – defined as centres with a population greater than those in Tier 4 but not listed under Tiers 1 or 2)
- Tier 4 – Other regional locations (defined as centres with a population less than a determined level)

These tiers can also be useful in segmenting supply (the provision of international education) and matching it with demand in particular segments within particular source markets.

However, it is important that the language of 'non-major metropolitan' and its various tiers not be used in material for students, parents and other influencers such as agents. This nomenclature should only be employed as a tool for policy makers, providers and other stakeholders to help frame what we are trying to achieve in terms of diversifying where international students choose to study and not in student-facing marketing or promotional material. The words we use are important, particularly when it is being translated into other languages. By way of example, the word 'regional' translates to 'backwater' when translated into Thai. Therefore, material for students, agents and parents needs to focus on the key value proposition (KVP) of a particular study destination including (where applicable):

- course offerings in specialised areas
- availability and affordability of accommodation and living expenses
- transportation options
- community and corporate partnerships – especially surrounding research opportunities and access to part-time work during study and opportunity for post-study work experience
- in-class learning experience (e.g. class size, interaction with Australian students and diverse international student cohorts)
 - diversity of student populations both within the classroom setting and on the wider campus promotes a higher level of English language and subsequent mastery
- institution / community activities
- environmental and cultural emersion
- multi-cultural communities especially family and friend support structures

Community acceptance

In the development and implementation of policies and programs that support destination diversity it is important to harness the goodwill and welcoming nature of the people of non-major metropolitan areas. It is also important to acknowledge and address the less positive perceptions of international students that may be present in those communities. The perceptions that may need particular consideration and initiatives to counter them are firstly, that international students 'take' the places of domestic students, particularly in our public schools and institutions, and secondly, that they 'take' the jobs of Australians. The third perception relates to the first two. Negativity may emerge if the broader community sees that governments and providers are providing disproportionate support to international students to encourage them beyond Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, while not providing the same or better support

for local young people to access education, training and employment opportunities in their area or in the larger metropolitan centres.

Navitas is not suggesting that these views are widely held in the community, however where they do exist they have the potential to derail well intentioned and impactful policies and programs. On the first issue, it is still unclear to some in our community that international student enrolments are not at the expense of domestic students. A strong and ongoing campaign such as the initiatives already underway from the Council for International Education (the Council) around community engagement help to address this perception.

On the second issue, it is important that policy makers and providers are cognisant of the fact that in some of the regions we hope to increase the number of international students, local youth unemployment is at extremely high levels. Indeed, the headline national youth unemployment rate of 12.2 per cent, that is double the rate of overall unemployment, masks striking locational differences. A [report](#) from the Brotherhood of St Laurence earlier in 2018 shows the top 20 regions in Australia for youth unemployment (see **Attachment A**). Work has already been done by governments and across the sector that shows that international students are in fact net contributors to employment levels where they live and study. It is important that these positive messages are communicated in ways and via channels that connect with the target audience.

On the final point, governments and providers must be conscious when providing any packaged offering to international students – including support such as scholarships, accommodation guarantees and support finding part-time employment – that a similar offering is available for domestic students. The Australian Government's [\\$400 million package](#) to support access to higher education for regional students is a positive measure in this regard, as are the many institutional-level programs aimed at supporting access and successful completion by students at regional institutions.

Achieving destination diversity

Navitas understands that there has been a large response from the sector, states and territories, study clusters and other stakeholders to the call from the Council for submissions on how to encourage more international students to study outside of our three major metropolitan centres. Navitas is also familiar with the work Austrade and the Department of Education and Training have been doing to inform such initiatives, including piloting the #gobeyond campaign earlier this year. We support these initiatives, and many of the ideas and views contained in submissions from sector peak bodies of which we are members, such as the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA). The following points are made to both re-affirm and augment various insights and suggestions already received.

Partnerships

As agencies and organisations such as Austrade and IEAA have already identified, leveraging existing partnerships and creating new ones are key to achieving destination diversity in Australian international education. Following are two possible approaches that harness these kinds of partnerships.

Intra-Australia student mobility

Australian education providers in higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and schools have been very successful over a long period in supporting the global mobility of their students. The framework of agreements and relationships that underpin these overseas study experiences could be replicated between institutions in major metropolitan cities and those 'beyond'. Providers can develop short or longer term experiences / programs at a course level that would enable students – potentially both domestic and international – to undertake study that is credit-bearing. This could be on an exchange basis (more viable if domestic students are included due to a small volume of international student currently in non-major metro cities) or a one-way flow from major metropolitan centres to other locations that is more akin to the study abroad model. Indeed, institutions with multiple campuses in areas outside Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane could facilitate this across their own network. For example, for Navitas and our university partner La Trobe University, the opportunity exists to deliver both ELICOS and some Diploma programs at their regional campuses, particularly its Bendigo campus. The latter for both international and domestic students.

Another exciting element of this approach is the potential for multi-provider arrangements – including public-private partnerships (PPPs). Public-private partnership is in Navitas' DNA. We know the great outcomes that can be achieved when Australia's quality public institutions partner with innovative and entrepreneurial independent providers. The opportunity exists here for a range of partnerships to emerge and evolve. For example, arrangements could be within sectors, e.g. two Sydney-based independent higher education providers partnering with a public university in regional town or TAFE Queensland partnering across its network of campuses and with an independent VET provider to deliver programs beyond Brisbane. It could also potentially work across sectors, for example with a school from Melbourne, Sydney or Brisbane working with a university to develop short programs for their upper-grade international students to undertake an experiential learning or tailored study experience outside the city.

Intra-Australia student mobility would facilitate the expansion of international education in non-major metropolitan cities, while ameliorating a major barrier that currently exists, the strong preference of international students and their parents to attend highly ranked universities and highly regarded institutions and schools. This is because the student still receives their qualification from the 'home' provider. The rise in micro-credentials – including the consideration by the Noonan review of how micro-credentials could be incorporated into the Australian Qualifications Framework – could enable and encourage more metro-based students spending some time 'beyond'. For example, micro-credentials for specialised or tailored industry-related programs in the regions in collaboration with tourism, agriculture and health providers.

There is a role, at least initially, for the federal government to host some national forums for providers to explore the potential for such mobility programs and for practitioners within institutions to workshop how to overcome potential barriers. Such forums could include 'speed dating' or 'pitch' sessions to match major metropolitan providers with partners beyond Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane city that have complementary or extension programs. This would need to be underpinned by work from the non-metro institution to identify their key strengths and niche offerings.

There is also be a role for government in funding – or at least co-funding with the sector – the roll out a number of pilot programs that test various approaches to intra-Australia student mobility, including the identification of attractive programs and the promotion to relevant student cohorts. Further, Austrade’s ‘Go beyond’ campaign could incorporate an onshore promotional element to market these opportunities to students. This would be a national campaign under which providers could dove-tail their own promotional material. Finally, the widespread introduction of intra-Australia student mobility would constitute another national innovation that Australia has led the world on in international education, thus being a strong point of difference in an increasingly competitive global environment.

Local consortia

Recognising that achieving destination diversity will be a combination of national initiatives (e.g. Austrade’s #gobeyond and data insights powered by the Department of Education and Training), state government support as well as on-the-ground collaborations by local stakeholders, it is important to explore the final element in more detail. There are many existing example of effective practice when it comes to local partnerships that promote and facilitate non-major metropolitan international education. It is valuable to gather and share these initiatives more broadly. There is also an opportunity to pilot new and innovative approaches to local consortia, potentially utilising an identified portion of the Australian Government’s Enabling Growth and Innovation (EGI) grant funding. Guidelines could stipulate that eligible initiatives must bring together stakeholders from at least two different international education sectors, as well as local government, local tourism operators, at least two local businesses or the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry. This recognises the central role of local councils, tourism industry and business and other related stakeholders play in the attractiveness of the overall offer to prospective international students. The pilot could involve four to six regional consortia projects with the lessons learned reported on and communicated across the sector.

Global skills hubs

Further opportunities exist for non-major metropolitan areas to establish ‘global skills hubs’ in areas of areas of high skills shortages, both in Australia and in key international markets as evidenced by a program in Rockhampton, Queensland. The city hosts Korean students on six months holiday visas who undertake abattoir training through TAFE and short term, paid work experience with a local employer Teys. This addresses a desperate shortage in skilled local workers willing to do this work in the region. This is a model could be leveraged and expanded to other regions where skills are in chronic demand. Austrade has a role in identifying such opportunities through initiatives such as it’s [‘where to compete’](#) matrix.

Who is more likely to be attracted to a non-major metropolitan offering?

The data included in the Department’s discussion paper *Growing International Education in Regional Australia* points to some potential market segments that are more likely to be open to studying full qualifications in non-major metropolitan areas. Those being, Masters by Coursework and postgraduate research students and students studying in a STEM-related field.

Providers beyond the metropolitan centres of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane should consider these data insights when developing programs and in their marketing and promotion campaigns.

In addition to program offerings, it is important to consider the types of students themselves that may have a propensity to life and study beyond our major cities – their backgrounds and personality traits. Anecdotally, students who choose a more diverse study destination tend to be more adventurous, independent and are more prepared for and open to, experiencing a different lifestyle to what they may be used to in their home country. Some focused research with those students studying outside of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane provides insights into the market segments to target for such destinations and what would be appealing to them in marketing collateral.

It is also useful to consider which source markets overall would be open to pursuing international education opportunities outside of Australia's major metropolitan cities. Navitas is familiar with the approach of the higher education institutions outside of the United Kingdom's major cities to consciously pursue a more diverse source market strategy. These destinations included: Coventry, Aberdeen, Sunderland and Newcastle, Plymouth and Portsmouth. At the time, the source markets they targeted included Nigeria, Kenya, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. The strategy focussed on the development needs and workforce skills needs of those countries and promoted a range of vocationally focussed 'work-ready' degrees delivered by the former polytechnics in those non-major metropolitan cities. The value proposition included strong and often reinforced messages regarding the lower cost of living, the availability of appropriate courses, part-time work and the benefits of a smaller university and more accessible community environment. These messages and the experience of the early cohorts of students created a strong proposition in markets that had – until that point – yielded relatively few international students. These markets have since grown to become major recruitment territories for the UK.

What more we need to know

Navitas suggests that there are two streams of further research and analysis needed to facilitate greater numbers of international students undertaking a study experience beyond Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. The first is supply-side analysis. This analysis would identify the KVP a particular institution, each geographic area and the whole-of-sector (national). Developing a story around the key selling points at each of these levels is important to inform program / offering development and marketing. The second should focus on demand-side. That is, market research focused on key decision-points and influencers to maximise the chances of recruiting students to those study destinations.

Finally, Navitas, like many providers in the sector, understands the pivotal role that education agents play in the decision-making process of students. Experience with our own strong and deep relationships with our agent network informs us that providing agents with 'content' about a particular study option is invaluable, as is the opportunity to show agents first-hand (through familiarisation tours etc.) what the experience of the students will be like. Navitas would therefore support initiatives targeting high quality and influential agents in key markets.



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Regions with the 20 highest youth unemployment rates in Australia, January 2018

Source: *An unfair Australia? Mapping youth unemployment hotspots*, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, March 2018

See link [here](#).

Table 1: Regions with the 20 highest youth unemployment rates in Australia, January 2018

Rank	Region	Jan 2018 (%)	Jan 2016 (%)	Change 2016 to 2018 (percentage points)
1	Queensland – Outback (Qld)	67.1	32.6	34.5
2	Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven (NSW)	28.7	18.8	10.1
3	Wide Bay (Qld)	27.7	20.3	7.4
4	Tasmania – South East (Tas.)	21.8	20.5	1.3
5	Murray (NSW)	21.5	13.9	7.7
6	Coffs Harbour – Grafton (NSW)	19.8	9.4	10.4
7	Melbourne – West (Vic.)	18.7	17.4	1.3
8	Central Coast (NSW)	18.6	16.3	2.3
9	Adelaide – North (SA)	18.4	16.5	1.9
10	Townsville (Qld)	18.1	17.9	0.2
11	Mandurah (WA)	17.7	13.9	3.8
12	Melbourne – North West (Vic.)	17.5	14.4	3.1
13	Adelaide – West (SA)	17.0	12.4	4.6
14	Logan – Beaudesert (Qld)	17.0	15.9	1.1
15	Adelaide – South (SA)	16.9	15.3	1.6
16	New England and North West (NSW)	16.6	17.8	-1.2
17	South Australia – South East (SA)	16.3	14.2	2.1
18	Bendigo (Vic.)	16.2	11.4	4.8
19	Shepparton (Vic.)	16.1	14.6	1.5
20	Perth – North West (WA)	16.0	14.7	1.3

Note: Regional youth unemployment rates estimated by author using 12-month averages.

Source: ABS 2018, Datacube RM1 – Labour force status by region (ASGS SA4), sex and age, October 1998 onwards