

Organisation: The Gordon Institute of TAFE

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

Breakdown the myths that lead students away from regional towns and cities and into urban centres.

These myths are:

- "There are no jobs for international students in regional Australia". This is not necessarily true, in fact, there's less competition for student jobs in regional Australia as the number of students studying in regional cities is less than in the major cities. So students aren't competing with as many student applicants in the peak periods. Perhaps the government could fund/encourage institutions to hire international students as interns? That would be wonderful and a positive way to support students.
- "The immigration department often discriminates against students applying to study in regional Australia and visa refusals are more likely if students are choosing a regional destination". Unfortunately this comes up a lot and agents are often wary about sending students to regional destinations for this reason. The Department of Home Affairs should release regular statistics on the visa grant and refusal rates for regional cities so that these can be compared to grant and refusal rates in capital cities, to show that there is equity there.
- "Employers in regional Australia don't want to employ international students". International students have many job skills that would be highly valued to future employers in regional Australia but due to cultural misunderstandings they struggle to articulate these skills. One example is their language skills, many students speak numerous languages, yet they often fail to list these languages on their resumes or cover letters. Perhaps funding could be given to Skills and Jobs Centres, or careers counselors at Unis/TAFEs to encourage them to run culturally specific 'how to get a job' seminars that are not generic, but are culturally aware and give specific tips to international students about how to make themselves stand out in the job recruitment process.
- "People in regional Australia are racist". Unfortunately racism does occur in Australia, as it does in all countries, but it is by no means limited to regional Australia, yet this stigma does exist. We need to counteract this stigma but running campaigns that show friendly, welcoming regional employers, students, community members etc. We know that people who live in regional Australia are often more laidback and friendly and the majority of people welcome cultural diversity. We need to leverage this as we know our friendliness is one of our key strengths and can go a long way towards making international students feel welcome.
- "There is nothing going on in regional Australia and it's isolating". This also isn't true, think of the incredible foodie scenes popping up in and around regional Australia, as well as the incredible art and culture, events and sporting venues. Perhaps we could draw more high profile celebrities to regional cities to draw attention to these features and run a campaign around this?
- "There's little to no public transport in regional Australia". This is a hard one as it's often true, so perhaps international students could be given concessions on public transport to make it more affordable for them to use.

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

- The number one barrier is poor, expensive and unreliable public transport. To attract more international students to regional Australia the Government should consider a public transport concession for international students to make it more affordable for them to use. This would be a huge incentive, if this is not possible, how about offering free Taxi/Uber vouchers for newly arrived international students?
- There's a lack of awareness around the benefits of studying in Regional Australia due to a lot of the promotional campaigns being focused on Melbourne and Sydney, rather than on regional cities/towns. Think of the affordability benefit, Regional Australia is much often a much more affordable place to live than in the major cities.
- The liveability awards and stats often favour cities like Melbourne and Sydney. What if we had a QS score rating for regional cities only? This would give each regional city and town the chance to not be compared to the capital cities, but to each other and to be considered a value proposition in its own right.
- The word regional is considered to have a negative connotation in many cultures, as regional often means a 'backwater'. It would be great to have video campaigns that focus on the vitality of regional towns (showing not just empty beaches and forests) but bustling nightlife and culture. This could help to counteract the prevailing thought that 'regional' equals a lack of opportunity and is just as fun and exciting.

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?

Study pathways between regional and metro institutions could be a good way to do this. Also joint promotions and events.

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

- Good video content is key, students want to visualise what we mean when we say 'regional Australia'.
- It would be wonderful to have a regional city network website, devoted solely to promoting study opportunities in regional Australia, sharing regular blog posts on popular regional study destinations to help debunk myths and having a review system – where students who have studied in these cities can share their reviews and testimonials to encourage others to choose regional Australia.

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 Greater Geelong and the Bellarine could provide best practice here, they have set up a Study Geelong group to promote Geelong as an education city. They also run lots of free events and are looking at putting together a friends and relatives promo campaign.

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)?

- A government scholarship for regional Australia would be a fantastic way to support the sector, as long as it's not just for higher education providers and that VET/TAFEs are also included.
- Migration incentives are good but unfortunately institutions are not allowed to promote this benefit due to DOHA's GTE criteria. So migration incentives are not promoted by institutions. This is certainly an incentive for students, but unfortunately there's not enough awareness out there about the migration incentives.

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?

- A lot of this work has already been done, particularly by institutions who frequently survey their students. There's a lot of survey fatigue out there for students. The main barriers to international student recruitment in regional areas are known to institutions who work in this space on a day-to-day basis.

Question 8. Any other comments?

As a regional TAFE we are very excited about the government's announcement that they will be focusing on promoting international education in the regions. Our hope is that we can offer students practical incentives to encourage them to get excited about regional study, this could be anything from public transport discounts, regional study scholarships, post study work rights visas for TAFEs in regional Australia and positive, attractive and shareable comms content. Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.