

## **Organisation: University of Wollongong**

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

As noted in the Consultation Paper: Growing International Education in Regional Australia, a key challenge in getting more students to consider a regional study experience is tackling any perception in the market for international students that regional institutions are lower ranked institutions and have limited course offerings.

It is critical that efforts be made to communicate that regional universities offer the same standard of high quality education as many metropolitan universities. In doing this, the emphasis of an institution should not be on whether it is in a metropolitan or regional location, but rather on its education programs.

It is also important to note that each region and each regional university in Australia has its own unique and distinguishing features. Regional universities should not be lumped together as a single group, but promoted individually on the merits of what each offers, such as its programs, its links to specific industry and, possible employment outcomes.

As noted in the Consultation paper, data from the International Student Survey 2016 shows that overall satisfaction scores for international student enrolled at a regional institution were 1.6% higher than metropolitan counterparts in their education experiences. Efforts to communicate such positive feedback may also assist better promote the update of study at regional institutions to prospective international students.

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

As noted in response to Q1 of this Submission (above), the perception that regional universities offer lower quality education to that of universities located in metropolitan areas can be an impediment to growing international education outside metropolitan areas. Similarly, there is the perception that there are fewer employment outcomes for graduates of regional universities. These impediments should be addressed when promoting Australia's higher education opportunities offshore.

It is also important that prospective students understand the benefits that each university can offer them throughout and after their study. Prospective international students should be made aware of the industries which exist in surrounding regions of an institution, the connections institutions have with their local industry and, the often strong employment opportunities these connections can provide following completion of their study.

Again, it is important to note that the opportunities differ and are unique from region to region. Universities should therefore be marketed in a way which acknowledges their individuality, not bundled as 'metropolitan' or 'regional'.

Use of the term 'regional' in marketing campaigns should be avoided in favour of campaigns that highlight the unique features of specific locations/Universities, underpinned with the systemic quality of an Australian education experience.

**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?**

The NUW Alliance, which was officially launched in July 2017, brings together the University of Newcastle, the University of New South Wales, and UOW with a shared commitment to explore some of the short and long term challenges impacting NSW, and to generate economic and social benefits for the State and national economy. With a geographical reach from the Mid North Coast to the South Coast of NSW – home to 25% of Australia’s population - this collaboration is the first grouping of its kind in Australia.

Initiatives such as the NUW Alliance, which is helping to create new collaborative connections between metropolitan and regional universities, may help to create opportunities to further regional study opportunities for international students.

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

Regional based campaigns which can promote regional study programs and the benefits of a destination, involving a coordinated efforts of education institutions, industry and governments may be helpful in promoting the benefits of particular regions to prospective international student markets and their families.

It is important that messages do not focus on an institution being ‘regional’, but rather the benefits of the area in which it is based, including what makes it unique, it’s programs, research strengths, its connections with industry and the success of its graduates

**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?**

International education provides countless benefits, both economic and social to regions. It is important to try and maximise the benefits of this valuable market. To do so, a collaborative approach from education providers, industry and relevant governments should be adopted in regions to approach the challenge of attracting and retaining potential students to the area.

However, it is important that regional universities are primarily promoted for the quality of their education programs and experience, and that the tourism related features of their location be promoted as a secondary benefit.

For example, in the case of UOW, it is important that the University’s strong international reputation for world-class research and exceptional teaching quality and its ranking amongst the top 250 of universities worldwide is promoted to prospective international students as higher order features compared to our proximity to world class beaches.

**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)?**

The introduction of a range of incentives at various points of a potential international students' contact with the Australian higher education sector may be of assistance in helping to grow international education in regional Australia.

Such incentives could be applied from the point of a student's initial visa application; during their study; whilst on their post-study visa and associated with any application for permanent residency. Suggested incentives include;

- Introduction of a two tier visa fee system (currently \$575), with the lower tier applied by either a full or partial rebate. Students applying offshore to Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne university's would continue to pay full visa fees, whilst students who elect to apply to study outside these areas would receive a rebate on their visa fees. To ensure students remain studying in a regional area for at least a reasonable period of time, it is suggested that the visa rebate not be provided until at least 12 months of continuous study in a Regional institution.
- Extend the work limitation on a student and/or their family members whilst studying on a student visa, from 40 hours per fortnight to 60 hours per fortnight, if the student and their family study at a regional university and reside in a regional area.
- Extend post-study work rights from 2 to 4 years for students who have undertaken their study at a regional university and find employment in regional areas. This may need to be assessed using individuals' residential addresses.
- Students who have undertaken a set period of time studying at a regional university could be given additional points in support of their application for a Skilled Migration visa.
- In order to for international students to remain in regional areas once they have completed their studies in Australia it is important that there is sufficient level of suitable employment opportunities available to them in the regions. It is therefore suggested that the government provide incentives to businesses who provide employment to these students in regional areas. Such incentives may be in the form of a form of tax concessions for employers who employ students on Post-Study Work Stream visas.

It is noted that each of Australia's key international student markets has different motivations when electing which university to undertake their study, including costs factors and the likelihood of gaining permanent residency after the completion of their education. The suggested incentives to help grow international education in regional Australia may therefore only appeal to certain student markets.

**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, comparative data which helps understand international student's perceptions about studying in regional areas and, of their actual experiences studying at regional institutions,

compared to that of metropolitan universities would certainly be beneficial. Such data may help to: deepen our understanding of what motivates prospective students' to select (or not select) a particular university; to identify and address issues impacting international students' experiences at regional universities; and, to help promote examples of positive experiences at regional institutions.

Research should focus on a range of Australia's key international education markets.

**Question 8. Any other comments?**

The University of Wollongong (UOW) recognises the importance of Australia's international education market. As noted in the Consultation Paper: Growing International Education in Regional Australia, international education contributed \$32 bill to the Australian economy in 2017-18 and supported more than 240,000 jobs across the country in 2017. Currently the majority of international students elect to study in Australia's large Australian cities, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Given the economic and social value that international education stands to offer regional economies and communities, it is important that more be done to attract international students to study at regional universities.

UOW welcomes the Department of Education and Training's efforts to seek submissions from interested parties that inform government efforts to encourage international students to have a study experience outside of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, and has prepared the following key points for consideration in response to the Consultation questions.