

Organisation: Wee Hur Capital

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

Brisbane has further capacity to grow: It is unfair to classify Brisbane alongside Sydney and Melbourne as a major city, given that in terms of economic growth and international enrolment numbers, Brisbane is half the size of Sydney or Melbourne, and has further capacity to grow. Brisbane should therefore be classified as regional cities to be promoted with other cities of a similar size.

Branding and positioning regional Australia is key to success: For instance, Melbourne and Sydney have received wider international attention and recognition due to the high ranking of key universities, as well as strong tourism campaigns promoting the lifestyle and attractions. Much less is known about regional Australia. Perhaps a campaign using a high profile Australian celebrity to focus on promoting tourism and education may help drive awareness of those areas e.g. building on Tourism Australia's campaign with Chris Hemsworth but now using different celebs to highlight different aspects of regional Australia, including student accommodation where it forms a large part of a student's life.

Improving quality and ranking of regional universities: Many parents and students look at university rankings, and this is consistent with feedback from overseas education agents. For instance, parents are very demanding and interrogate the UK, USA and AU reps on everything at a consultation session. If the campaign focuses on attracting students to study in regional cities (excluding Brisbane in this argument), Australia as a whole will quickly lose out to the UK and USA given the less attractive offer compared to OxBridge and Ivy League calling for their attention. In addition, the rankings of the Group of 8 universities are not on par with UK and USA top universities. Parents would be less likely to even consider universities outside Group of 8 in regional cities. Decision making lies with university ranking rather than location i.e. they want to go to a certain location due to the university and not vice versa.

It's not a zero sum game: To promote the regional cities does not mean restricting the number of international students enrolling in metropolitan cities universities; at the same time, neither will the surplus demand automatically go to the regional cities. The students will simply look at other countries than Australia if they think the offer from Australian regional universities are not good enough.

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

Less developed public transport: Public transport is less developed than major cities which is not ideal for international students who may not necessarily drive. Also, there is less access to direct international flights to their home country so most are less willing to be located outside of major cities with more convenient access to an international airport. For example, a student whose home is in a second-tier city in China may have to take 2-3 connecting flights before reaching their home city. This is time-consuming and tiring for the student.

Costly regional flights: Regional flights are also costly compared to other countries e.g. South

East Asia where budget airfare for domestic flights is more reasonable due to volume of passengers; to an international student who has already incurred tuition fees and living costs, this is an unnecessary additional cost to bear.

Less options for accommodation: Accommodation is also less developed for students in regional areas e.g. there are less choices, and facilities might be aged. Investors are also less likely to explore regional areas since there is a lack of student numbers to generate enough income.

Erroneous to classify international students the same category as immigrants: There is a fundamental misconception that the profile, and therefore behaviour, of international students is similar to immigrants, and therefore this filtering policy can be applied. Students look at university ranking as their decision-making factor, while immigrants look at quality of life (i.e. the city itself) as their decision-making factor. For instance, even if immigrants are encouraged to live in regional cities, they may be more accepting as they are just looking a better quality of life than their home country. Furthermore, if the immigrant does not like the city they are in, they could relocate. For a student, it's a transfer of university, and it doesn't work the same way. The objective of the respective groups are simply not the same.

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?

Focus should be on quality of universities: The paper focuses a lot on what the State Government can do. However, one of the key factors in decision-making lies in a university's ranking. Even if the regional city raises its profile and offers a great lifestyle, but if the university does not match up to the student's expectation in terms of quality education, the student still won't consider heading there. A good example is Oxford and Cambridge; the city itself has nothing much to offer, and the housing is all old, but students flock there year after year because they want to receive the top notch education.

Enhance PBSA profile and encourage universities to work with PBSAs: Student living is a massive part of a positive student experience. Student accommodation is more than a living space, it forms an integral part of student life where international students have the chance to make new friends, learn new cultures and become part of a close-knitted community. It is essential that institutions consider Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) as a key partner in marketing campaigns or promotional efforts, as PBSAs provide a safe and hassle-free living environment for students as compared to the private rental market. For example, universities could consider withholding a student's grades if the student fails to pay rental; or if the PBSA Residential Advisor notices any unusual behaviour they could notify the school to provide the necessary guidance and counselling.

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

Study tours: Perhaps there could be a competition to sponsor a few parents/students from each country to visit 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?

Joint marketing campaigns with regions that have higher awareness with international target audience: With Brisbane being considered as a regional city, it is to be noted that Gold Coast has a stronger reputation and awareness for tourist attractions compared to Brisbane. Aside from UQ's international reputation, most students and parents are not aware of Brisbane or its educational offering. In this case, Brisbane could work hand in hand with Gold Coast and other similar regions to run a joint marketing campaign, leveraging on Gold Coast's strength in tourism to raise awareness of Brisbane's strength in education e.g. study and live in Brisbane, play in Gold Coast.

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)?

Raise awareness of Brisbane: Many overseas education agents have not even been to Brisbane, much less be knowledgeable about the city's offering to promote it. On the other hand, many more are familiar with Melbourne and Sydney, whether from tourism or education perspective. Subsidies could be given to institutions to host more overseas agents from different countries (other than the key markets such as China and India) where more get the opportunity to learn about what Brisbane has to offer.

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. Every student has a different reason why they wish to study in Australia (regional areas or not), and understanding their psychology and motivations could help industry players form a better strategy in developing student recruitment campaigns.

Question 8. Any other comments?