

## **Organisation: Welcoming Australia**

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

The current political and media discourse of fear, division and race-baiting, along with broader uncertainty in relation to potential visa changes, threatens attraction of international students to Australia. The growing perception that Australia is not 'welcoming' needs to be a key consideration. The population distribution challenge is not unique to international students - regional communities are generally struggling to attract migrants (skilled, family, humanitarian, students). The success factors of regional settlement need to be considered, before advancing on the issue of 'attraction':

- long-term strategic coordination;
- inclusive planning;
- welcoming communities;
- matched employment; and,
- accessible and culturally-appropriate services (across housing, transport, education, health and community support).

In the absence of the above any work around attraction will be wasted due to the failed retention on international students in regional communities. In consideration of the above factors, and if those factors are in place, then they can be promoted. More than a 'valuable and unique experience' will international students have a sense of value and belonging?

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

Barriers can be identified in consideration of the success factors outlined above. Are communities welcoming? Will employers hire them? Are there accessible (and culturally inclusive) services and infrastructure?

### **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 contextualised learning opportunities (for any discipline) are significant. Broadly, the issues facing metropolitan centres (rapid urbanisation and growth) are disparate to regional communities (population and economic decline, along with understanding increasing diversity (relative)). Course content, study tours, research placements could all be considered.

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

Community profiles, case studies, testimonials.

**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?**

Local Government can play a key role. Many metropolitan Councils understand and champion the value of international students to their cities and communities. The Australian Standard for Welcoming Cities assist Local Councils to benchmark and advance their cultural diversity and inclusion practices across everything they do. When considered in the context of leadership, social and cultural inclusion, economic development, skills development and training, and places and spaces - international students add significant value. The Standard provides the framework for Councils and their communities to address, map and leverage these opportunities.

**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)?**

More carrot, less stick (so to speak). The rhetoric, threats of punitive measures and race-baiting needs to cease. Visa changes could certainly encourage more students to consider regional locations but the success factors (previously outlined) have to be considered and addressed. Toowoomba (Queensland) and Bendigo (Victoria) are examples of growing success in this space because they (including the Local Council) are applying a considered and coordinated approach to settlement.

**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?**

Possibly. Broader migrant sentiment, attitudes and experiences (in relation to regional settlement) are likely applicable.

**Question 8. Any other comments?**

We're currently working with the Queensland Government to consider regional settlement and having similar conversations with the Victorian Government - the learnings from that research project and pilot in partnership with Monash University's Migration and Inclusion Centre - may be of use / interest (completion December 2018).