



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Education**

# Positioning for deeper engagement: a plan of action in India

India Reference Group (IRG)

A Report to the Council  
for International Education



**Australia India  
Institute**

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## Acknowledgements

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## Executive summary

India is at the forefront of Australia's education relationships. A long friendship, based on shared values and common interests, has created a strong foundation for an enduring partnership on education. Formal agreements in place since 1970 have been enlivened by student exchanges and partnerships that enrich Indian and Australian students, academics and education institutions.

Much analysis has already been undertaken to consider how Australia might work with India as it rises to reach its global potential, with the centrality of education already acknowledged by both countries. Most recently, *An India Economic Strategy to 2035: Navigating from potential to delivery* (the IES) by Peter Varghese AO affirmed education as the flagship for Australia's increased engagement with India.

The India Reference Group (IRG) was commissioned by the Council for International Education to provide advice about how Australia's education sector and governments could work together to drive the recommendations of the IES. With leadership from co-Chairs Phil Honeywood and Trevor Schwenke, and later from Mary Faraone, the IRG focused on the immediate and tangible steps that needed to be identified in the next three years to position for the longer-term agenda the IES outlined. The IRG also considered developments in the Indian landscape since the release of the IES.

To navigate the complexity of the vibrant Indian education context, the IRG identified four key issues, drawn from the IES's education recommendations, that require immediate attention and action:

- building strength and cohesion in Australian education branding;
- increasing student and academic mobility;
- increasing research collaboration; and
- building opportunities in the VET sector.

To explore these themes, the IRG augmented the IES's analysis with expert advice, including a competitor analysis and a suite of consultative workshops with key sectoral stakeholders. The key finding was that although the case for increased engagement was clear, education providers felt that there were key gaps in their knowledge and capabilities that were holding them back. Granular and practical market guidance about opportunities is being sought, alongside shared leadership between governments and institutions to drive consistency and collaboration.

In response, the IRG has compiled a suite of recommendations that, over three years, would help best position Australian providers by boosting available evidence and support to galvanise coordinated action. The recommendations call for:

- key pieces of research to better identify solid and viable opportunities and a Market Action Plan to provide advice on progressing the opportunities;
- initiatives to support consistent approaches, including from Australian governments; and
- practical support for education institutions, including a dedicated researcher hub in New Delhi and government-led missions in India.

## Recommendations summary

Full recommendations are listed in the Key Findings and Recommendations section on page 11.

### Building strength and cohesion in Australian education branding

#### Recommendation 1

To present a coordinated approach to India using a 'whole of country' message, Australian international education sector are encouraged to adopt consistent messaging for India, which will draw on Austrade's Strategic Messaging Framework, and distributed through provider networks and relevant peak bodies.

#### Recommendation 2

Austrade to develop a digital toolkit to provide advice and resources to Australian government agencies, Australian destination marketing organisations and education institutions on social media and digital marketing in India.

#### Recommendation 3

Austrade to deliver a Market Action Plan (MAP) on India to provide a platform for greater collaboration to strengthen the position of Australian education in India through an aligned, cross agency and sector effort to maximise benefit for the sector and Australia's brand.

#### Recommendation 4

The Department of Education and the Australia India Institute, with Austrade's support, to convene a meeting of state and territory governments as a

platform for building a more collaborative approach for Australian government, states and territory agencies.

### Increasing student and academic mobility

#### Recommendation 5

The Department of Education, in partnership with the Department of Home Affairs, to analyse and publish information on both the state-of-origin of Indian students and each key state's enrolment trends, to support providers with greater market intelligence.

#### Recommendation 6

The Australia India Institute (within existing Government funding) to work with GO8 and Austrade on a research project to explore the drivers underpinning Indian student mobility to Australia that will support Australian providers to market more effectively and target prospective students.

#### Recommendation 7

Department of Education to undertake an analysis of current Australian uptake of SPARC and GIAN programs. On the basis of that analysis, Universities Australia to convene a workshop with stakeholders to identify opportunities to increase Australian engagement with these programs.

### Increasing research collaboration

#### Recommendation 8

The Australia India Institute, with support from universities and funding (within existing Government funding), to establish a researcher hub in India.

### Recommendation 9

Austrade and the Department of Education to investigate and profile opportunities for Australian institutions looking to understand and engage India's research and development priorities. The initial activity would include the International Education and Research Conference to be held in New Delhi and shared insights as part of Austrade's continuing engagement with high quality institutions and leading corporates.

### Recommendation 10

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, in consultation with its Indian partners, should explore incorporating liberal arts aspects into the scope of future STEM projects under the AISRF.

### Recommendation 11

The Australia India Institute, with support from the GO8 and Department of Education, to create a series of case studies on members of the Indian diaspora and other faculty in Australia who are conducting research and engagement activities relevant to India and the Australia/India relationship. This will lead to the development of a body of knowledge on best practise, showcasing Australian capability and catalyse future research collaboration, teaching initiative, and joint programs across the bilateral relationship.

## Building opportunities in the VET Sector

### Recommendation 12

Australian Government to build on existing government-to-government education relationships to develop a specific VET MOU and body of collaborative work with the Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).

### Recommendation 13

Austrade, supported by the Department of Education, to lead a review of opportunities for skills development and training with Indian based industry partners as well as Indian states with the highest potential for VET collaboration, ensuring that these opportunities have a high potential for commercial activities/return.

### Recommendation 14

The Australian VET sector to test the findings of the metrics developed in Recommendations 12 and 13 to consider developing a sector-led consortia/s to visit identified key states/regions/cities in mid-2020, supported by Austrade and Department of Education officials in India, to explore identified opportunities for commercial outcomes.

### Recommendation 15

The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, to work with India to organise a skills conference in India in 2020 (in parallel with skills delegation/consortia), to explore topics of mutual policy interest, for example, developing TVET workforces or establishing effective VET in Schools programs.

## Background

### The India Reference Group

Recognising India as the second largest source country for international students for Australia plus the range of analysis of Australia-India education opportunities, the Council for International Education established the India Reference Group (IRG) in 2018 to:

- consult with the Australian education sector on implementing the outcomes of the India Economic Strategy,
- identify additional opportunities to further strengthen Australia's engagement with India in education, training and research,
- develop strategies to progress opportunities and outcomes outlined above.

### The India Economic Strategy

The India Economic Strategy (IES) was an independent report to the Australian Government, released in July 2018. The IES identifies ten sectors where Australia has competitive advantages in engaging with India but specified education as the 'flagship sector', "because of a combination of Australian expertise, the scale of India's education deficit, and the way in which education and training demand weaves its way through virtually every sector of the Indian economy."<sup>1</sup> The IES goes on to note that education is more than simply the recruitment of students. It also entails paying careful attention to research collaboration and education as a basis for enhancing international understanding.

<sup>1</sup>Varghese, P *India Economic Strategy*, 2018, p8.

The IES aims to provide a long-term roadmap for enhanced Australia-India engagement, to cement India as a priority economic partner. Its development process included 232 consultations in Australia and India with central state governments, peak bodies, education training and research institutions and non-profit organisations.

### Education recommendations in the IES

The IES identifies 24 policy recommendations in relation to education, mainly focussed on school and higher education. The IES included recommendations on branding, student exchange, scholarships, qualification recognition, and development of joint higher educational programs. Vocational education and skills are not prominent themes of the report and the discussion of research is largely limited to STEM.

For a full list of education recommendations from the IES, and the Australian government's response to the IES, please refer to the Appendix.

### India's Australia Economic Strategy

In response to the IES, the Indian Government commissioned an Australia Economic Strategy in India. Education is likely to feature strongly in this report, which will emphasise commercial and intellectual opportunities for India for partnering with Australia.

## Context

India's demographic trend will soon see it overtake China as the world's most populous country.

Currently, over 50 per cent of India's population, or around 600 million people, are under 25 years. Within the next five years, India will have the largest tertiary-age population in the world. The middle class (89 million households expected to join the global consumer class by 2025) – those best able to pay for a quality education – is expected to swell to around 500 million<sup>2</sup>.

With GDP growth rates set to exceed 8 per cent per annum, the demand for education and training can only grow.

India's domestic industry is increasing demand for skilled workers (an estimated additional 120 million skilled workers are needed by 2022). The vast majority of India's workforce is informal, and only a very small percentage have undertaken formal skills training. India is not well placed to meet demand; its formal skills development system accommodates comparatively few participants (7 million per year); much lower than emerging China (90 million) or industrialised United States (11 million).<sup>3</sup>

The demand for vocational education and training is expected to undergo an exponential surge. This suggests that India will emerge as the biggest opportunity for international education providers in the 21st century.

The skills sector in India has changed notably in the last five years. The establishment of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) in 2014 has resulted in a more coordinated and integrated approach to government policy,

programs and activity in this area. The MSDE governs a range of skills development providers including Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), international skill centres, polytechnics and skills universities that deliver vocational, employability and entrepreneurship programs and initiatives. This principally includes long-term vocational training programs, and, more recently, short-term vocational training and employment placement programs aligned to National Occupational Standards (NOS) Qualifications Packs (QPs).<sup>4</sup>

Despite improvements over the past decade to meet demand, quality is varied across the system and efforts to standardise accreditation and other measures are limited by the challenging scale of education delivery in India.

There are no Indian universities in the top 100 of the Times Higher Education rankings. Most students study in State-run universities and colleges that face difficult challenges in resourcing research, curricula, and governance.

The Indian Government's recent policy changes to increase quality in their higher education system and encourage foreign collaboration is supporting Australia's diversification strategies and contributing to strong growth in India. Reduced regulatory oversight from the central government, more autonomy for publicly funded universities and increased central government research funding for high performing institutions translates to a greater appetite for effective international partners. Private schools and universities continue to grow and now educate over 25 per cent of the student population – many of these institutions look to international partnerships and pathways to study overseas as part of their own brand building exercises.

The Indian government is acutely aware of the importance of quality education. Without this, the benefits of the demographic dividend might be squandered and potentially reduced, in fact, to a demographic missed opportunity.

It is under this historic challenge that the enormous opportunity and great responsibility for the India-Australia relations resides where increased collaboration in education and training could provide the much-awaited tipping point.

To lose this opportunity would be a major strategic setback and a squandered prospect.

## Education competitors

### International education

In 2017 a total of 305,970 Indian tertiary students studied abroad with the top five destination countries being the United States (135,733), Australia (51,976), Canada (19,905), United Kingdom (16,655) and United Arab Emirates (13,370).

Traditionally, Indian students prefer the United States and United Kingdom as study destinations, however Australia and Canada have increased market share in recent years as a result of favourable visa settings, including offering work rights both during and after study.

India's potential student cohort is highly attuned to the visa settings of destination countries, and student numbers readily respond to real or proposed changes. Australia saw enrolments dip sharply in 2009 and 2010 after study was decoupled from a clear migration pathway. Similarly, growth in Indian enrolments with US providers is slowing due to recent changes to migration options. Changing visa settings also saw the UK experience declining

numbers of Indian students in 2017-18. By contrast, Canada's shift to more favourable migration settings has resulted in rapid increases in the number of Indian international students. The growth of low-fee medical degrees in Russia and Eastern Europe (e.g., Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan) have led to increases in the number of enrolled Indian students, although professional qualifications recognition may present future challenges.

### Research collaboration

There are numerous collaborations underway between Australian universities and Indian institutions. The range of partnerships include collaborative work between researchers, joint research under the Australia India Strategic Research Fund, joint PhD supervision, the two-way flow of faculty and students, and emerging institutional and government-to-government connections via the Australia India Education Council and the work of peak bodies.

Overall, Australia is the fourth most popular country for research collaboration with India following the United States (46,785), China (28,941) and Germany (16,652). Israel, Japan, the United States Canada, the United Kingdom, Norway and Germany all outpace Australia in the establishment of joint Government-funded research programs and/or centres to drive research connections. Competitor countries are utilising the model of a government (and sometimes partially industry funded) in-country presence designed around a joint government-to-government research fund, to broaden their reach across and into the Indian research ecosystem. There is no doubt that Australia research collaboration benefits from the large and growing Indian academic diaspora now working in Australia's education system.

<sup>2</sup>World Bank (2016)

<sup>3</sup> Kazmin, A. (2014). *India desperately needs more vocational education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/26480db0-e734-11e3aa93-00144feabd0>

<sup>4</sup>Freeman, B. (2017). An introduction to India's skills system to facilitate increased Australia-India bilateral engagement. Australia India Institute: Melbourne.

## Skills

Australia faces competition from countries whose skills development arrangements are coupled with skilled migration and/or countries who have established industry partners in India. For example, Germany committed AUD 4.8m to establish German-Indo VET Institutes to allow labour mobility to Germany; Sweden and Japan have labour mobility agreements to train people in India and offer work permits in Sweden and Japan; and Singapore has contributed to training and assessment policy frameworks with National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and to reform of institutions with the Delhi Government. Japan and Germany often co-locate training centres alongside their own industry in India.

### The India-Australia education relationship

The Australia-India education relationship is strong, diverse, and growing.

### The Australia India Education Council (AIEC)

The Australian India Education Council (AIEC) was established in 2010 to allow high level engagement on shared education issues. It is co-Chaired by

Australia's and India's ministers with responsibility for education and meets roughly biennially. Its fifth meeting is expected to be held in India in late 2019 or early 2020.

The AIEC is unique among India's education partners and is a vital tool for Australia to pursue its education agenda. The AIEC develops strategic advice that informs and shapes future collaborative efforts and supports projects to build the bilateral knowledge partnership.

### Trends in Indian enrolments in Australia

Australia already contributes to meeting India's demand for foreign education with 89,000 Indian students studying in Australia in 2018, making it our second largest source country for international students. Indian student enrolments are concentrated in the higher education sector (two thirds of enrolments) which continues a trend of steady growth over the past four years. India maintains its position as top source country for VET enrolments, where Australia's reputation for providing quality, industry relevant training is highly attractive for Indian students seeking employment opportunities, with a particular focus on globally recognised skills training.

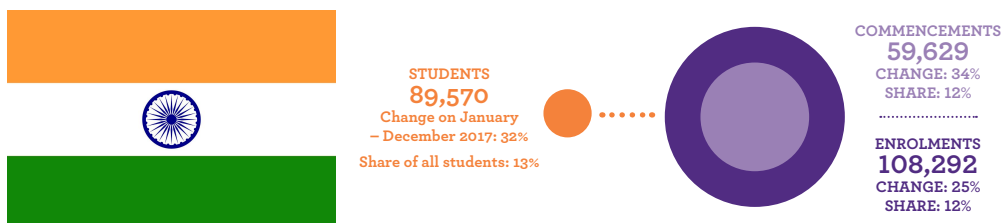
Student numbers from India have grown strongly in recent years. In 2018, there were 108,292 enrolments generated by 89,570 full-fee paying India

international students in Australia on a student visa. This represents a 24.5 per cent increase on 2017 and compares with an average annual enrolments growth rate of 14.7 per cent per year over the preceding five years. The commencements (new enrolments) increased by 33.5 per cent on 2017 figures. This compares with the average annual commencements growth rate of 11.2 per cent per year over the preceding five years.

Comparing data from March 2018 and March 2019, enrolments have risen 38 per cent, student numbers are up by 25 per cent and commencements have risen 50 per cent. Visa applications have risen 63 per cent, showing that more growth can be expected.

TABLE 3. INDIA ENROLMENTS & COMMENCEMENTS BY SECTOR AND YEAR 2017 AND 2018

Sector	Enrolments				Commencements			
	2017	2018	Growth on 2017	Share of all sectors	2017	2018	Growth on 2017	Share of all sectors
Higher Ed.	54,040	72,050	33.3%	66.5%	24,674	34,747	40.8%	58.3%
VET	27,258	29,784	9.3%	27.5%	15,550	19,210	23.5%	32.2%
Schools	230	269	17%	0.2%	106	131	23.6%	0.2%
ELICOS	5,062	5,687	12.3%	5.3%	4,051	5,128	26.6%	8.6%
Other	376	562	33.5%	0.5%	278	413	48.6%	0.7%
Total	86,966	108,292	24.5%	-	44,659	59,629	33.5%	-

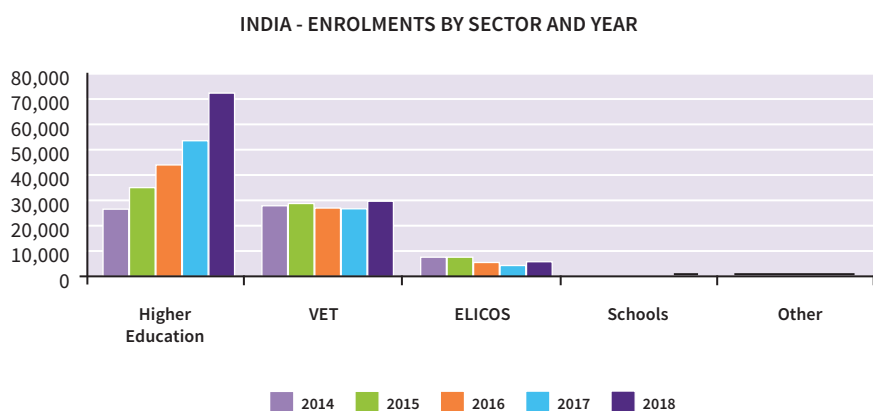


In terms of enrolments, higher education enrolments experienced strong growth of 174.5 per cent from 2014 to 2018. It is the largest sector, growing from 54,040 in 2017 to 72,050 enrolments in 2018 and accounting for 66.5 per cent of all enrolments from India over the period.

After higher education, VET is the next largest sector for Indian enrolments, making up 27.5 per cent in 2018. VET enrolments grew by 6.4 per cent, increasing from 27,980 in 2014 to 29,784 in 2018. Over the same period, VET enrolment growth from India was modest at 1.7 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

FIGURE 1. INDIAN ENROLMENTS BY SECTOR AND YEAR 2014-2018

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Student mobility programs are also growing rapidly, with record numbers of New Colombo Plan and university student mobility programs exploring partnerships with India and providing Australian students with an Indian education experience.

## Key findings and recommendations

The IES makes a clear argument about the demographic, economic and political circumstances driving Indian demand for Australian education. The IRG noted that since the IES's release, India's education agenda continues to evolve, with recent developments enhancing the case for action from Australian governments and providers:

- growth of India's own aspirations for international education that broadens dialogue and increases willingness to engage with Australia (and other countries);
- increased autonomy for some higher education providers that makes partnering with overseas partners more straightforward;
- the streamlining of India's skills regulators marked by a greater willingness to partner with Australian government and our education providers; and
- India releasing its draft National Education Policy (NEP), the first education policy in 26 years, describing India's desire for foreign collaboration partners to catalyse and accelerate improved education performance.

Using its thematic framework to negotiate this complexity, the IRG has identified the key opportunities and barriers to tackle between now and 2021.

While agreeing with the IES, that success in India requires a long-term approach emphasis has been given to the most immediate barriers to deeper engagement and to the opportunities presented by addressing those barriers. Stakeholders were clear that though they were eager to 'do more in

India', they were hesitant about where to begin and were looking for specific and pragmatic information, advice and evidence to better understand India's priorities and diversity.

### Building strength and cohesion in Australian education branding

Perceptions in India of the quality and prestige of Australian education institutions currently constrain Australia's exports in education. The IES noted that, "despite Australia's strong international reputation in the education sector and as a high quality education 'system' as a whole, Indian students perceive Australian education to lack gravitas"<sup>6</sup>.

While government involvement plays a significant role in projecting a strong Australian education brand, institutions can also embody the brand in their operations and approach. The IRG has considered how regular and frequent attention from senior Australian education leaders, packaged offerings that include preferably course-related employment opportunities, offering a broad range of merit-based scholarships and including social initiatives in institutions' engagement have already contributed to Australia's good reputation and attractiveness to India students, industry and institutions. More can be done, however, to bolster and encourage the spread of such practices.

Australian institutions tend to pursue their own competing marketing, which may complicate attempts to pursue a larger 'whole-of-country' messaging, and promotion of Australia's brand strength of systemic quality. Consistent and deliberate branding to unite the "fragmentary approach to education marketing in India"<sup>7</sup>, however, was strongly supported by the IRG and the sector representatives it consulted. Stakeholders

<sup>5</sup> Department of Education (2018). International Student Data. Retrieved from <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/international-student-data/pages/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Varghese, P. *India Economic Strategy*, 2018, p72

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Recommendation 6

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agreed that Australia's 'quality story' needed to be better told, and that institutions have yet to collaborate closely on developing an Australia-wide brand that can be marketed in India.

Due to Australia's market position in India, Indian international students choose a broader range of Australian universities compared to Chinese students, often undertaking non-research qualifications. Indian students pursuing higher degrees by research tend to choose the United States or United Kingdom for institutions that are perceived as more prestigious. This means there is significant opportunity for Australia to diversify its profile of Indian international students into higher degree courses by research, including PhDs. This, in turn, would provide more Australian institutions with opportunities to diversify their international student base, enhancing long-term sustainability.

The IRG also agreed the importance of the role government, especially Austrade, can play in ensuring effective branding. As one participant noted, "The government has a role in pulling us together to ensure the message about quality is heard from government and government agencies, about quality research and exemplars".<sup>8</sup> Hence, the following recommendations focus on how both government and institutions can better synthesize their efforts in branding.

## Recommendations

Stronger and more coordinated messaging that emphasises the quality of Australian education is needed. A consistent focus on quality will better represent Australia's market position and could contribute to a diversified and sustainable flow of students to Australia.

### Recommendation 1

To present a coordinated approach to the Indian market, the Australian international sector encouraged to adopt consistent messaging, referring to Strategic Messaging Framework and associated extensions, published by Austrade.

### Recommendation 2

Austrade to develop a digital toolkit to provide advice and resources to Australian government agencies, Australian destination marketing organisations and education institutions on the most efficient and effective digital marketing channels to engage future students in India as well as key decision makers on international education services.

### Recommendation 3

Austrade to deliver a Market Action Plan (MAP) on India to provide a framework for greater collaboration to strengthen the position of Australian education in India through an aligned, cross agency and sector effort to maximise benefit for the sector and Australia's brand. The MAP is envisaged to serve as a prelude to Recommendation 13 of this document where Austrade will review commercial skills and training opportunities in India.

### Recommendation 4

The Department of Education and Australia India Institute, with Austrade support, to convene a meeting of state and territory governments as platform for building a more collaborative approach for Australian government, states and territory agencies engaging on education, training and research in India.

## Increasing student and academic mobility

Stakeholders are positive about building mobility between India and Australia, although concerns over institutional and course concentration were reported.

India has the largest tertiary age (18-22) population in the world and unmet demand for higher education has mobilised large numbers of Indian students to seek international study destinations. Over 300,000 Indian higher education students studied abroad in 2017. For these students, Australia (51,976 students) is their second destination of choice, after the United States (135,733), which has historically been the leading host country.<sup>9</sup> India is the second largest sender country for Australia behind China (256,000 in 2018).<sup>10</sup>

While numbers of Indian students in Australia are high and rising, as noted above there are observable patterns in these students' choices of institutional type, location, study areas and qualification levels. IRG consultation workshops participants referred to a need to diversify the students coming to Australia from India and to ensure that Indian students access the full range of learning opportunities in Australia (for example, avoid being concentrated in one or two cities). Several participants advocated exploring greater recruitment of Indian students into undergraduate programs in Australia, citing this as a key emerging area for their institution. In relation to this issue, there was some discussion of the challenges that international students in general face when studying abroad related to lifestyle, visas, costs, work experience, and ensuring that study programs fit the needs of an international student population.

The IRG considered what risks, if any, were posed by current enrolment patterns but consultation did not deliver a consensus. Further work to identify the factors underpinning Indian students is needed to inform consideration of this issue.

The IRG also heard stakeholders report that relationships between Australian higher education institutions and industry are not as strong as they could be in areas such as employability; workplace learning/cooperative project opportunities. Unmet demand for scholarships was also a commonly expressed concern.

Australian programmes such as the New Colombo Plan and the former Endeavour scholarships have facilitated student flows into India, but these support mainly short-term programs. Very few Australian students participate in semester length or longer exchange programs or courses in India.

India's recently released draft National Education Policy 2019 proposes inviting the top 200 global universities to establish foreign branch campuses in India. Australian universities' interest in the possibility of 'standalone' operations in India has been low and this new development will test that position.

Perhaps of more interest will be the push for formalising Indian recognition of priority countries' twinning and articulation programs, as such programs are a common approach for Australian universities to attract Indian students and build research partnerships.

While the Government of India's education and research internationalisation agenda aims to increase the number of inbound international students, student flows into India have been low, reaching just 46,000 in 2017. India's 2018 Study in India initiative seeks to build India's appeal to globally mobile students.

<sup>8</sup> Research workshop, 13 March 2019

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2019). Global flow of tertiary-level students. Retrieved from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>

<sup>10</sup> Austrade (2019). Education data [data file]. Retrieved from <https://www.austrade.gov.au/Australian/Education/Education-Data/Current-data/pivot-tables>

India's positioning as an education destination creates new affinities with Australia, creating room for the countries to work together on areas of shared interest, including best practices in international education.

India is also seeking to attract international faculty into the country for short-term research and teaching visits. Indian government initiatives open to faculty at Australian universities include the Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN), which provides funding for teaching at selected Indian higher education institutions. The Government of India's Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) provides similar opportunities.

The IRG heard from Australian institutions with existing partnership arrangements with Indian institutions reflecting on the value and power of personal connections in forging research collaborations. The sector recognises the importance of shared PhD models in fostering these linkages but successful models are yet to take root across the sector.

Further, a lack of knowledge of India's tertiary education sector, including how to address regulatory issues, contributes to low Australian participation in mobility schemes. Some participants reported being unclear on the nature of India's SPARC and GIAN programs and wanted more information on which types of institutions in India would be the most appropriate partners.

Similarly, Australian institutions report needing more information to enhance their direct research collaboration with Indian partners, including academic mobility to India.

## Recommendations

The evidence base that supports institutions' effort to increase student and academic mobility must be improved. Analysis of existing datasets to better understand the entirety of Indian students' experience and views of Australian education is a necessary foundational step to catalyse further actions that will increase mobility.

### Recommendation 5

The Department of Education, supported by the Department of Home Affairs, to explore ways to better analyse and publish information on both the state-of-origin of Indian students and enrolment trends. This information will help Australian providers to consider opportunities to diversify student recruitment within India as a way to build resilience and identify promising students.

### Recommendation 6

The Australia India Institute (within existing Government funding envelope) to work with Austrade and Go8 on a research project to better understand the following:

- key drivers/motivations to come to Australia
- role of education agents, counsellors and other advisors
- which courses Indian students commence studying and graduate from
- employment outcomes for Indian students who studied in Australia, including/particularly those who have left Australia
- two-way research opportunities/challenges

The project will draw upon case studies with Indian alumni, diaspora and academics, as well as the existing International Student Survey raw data (and other existing data sources) to support research into the above objectives. Gaps identified in the study could inform future research by the Australia India Institute.

### Recommendation 7

Department of Education to undertake an analysis of current Australian uptake of SPARC and GIAN programs. On the basis of that analysis, Universities Australia to convene a workshop with stakeholders to identify opportunities to increase Australian engagement with these programs.

## Increasing research collaboration

Closer research collaboration and co-operation between local and international stakeholders helps to identify solutions to challenges facing both Australia and India and gives important ballast to the education relationship.

India is already one of Australia's most important education and research partners, with more than 8000 co-authored academic publications since 2013 and more than 400 research partnerships in place.

Many Australian universities have formalised arrangements with Indian higher education institutions. These agreements cover a range of areas, but there is appetite among Australian universities to increase research collaboration with India.

Current research collaboration is focused on institutions in Delhi, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, where India's population and infrastructure are heavily concentrated. Arrangements are similarly focused on India's leading higher education institutions, including

the Indian Institute of Science, Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Management, and elite universities.

The IRG reflected on successful models of academic collaboration. Several Australian universities have partnered with Indian institutions, including the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore (IISc) and IITs to deliver joint PhD programs in areas of mutual research interest. The Monash Academy, a partnership between the IIT Bombay and Monash University, is perhaps the best known of these. Other examples include the Australian National University partnership with the IISc and several leading IITs, and the University of Melbourne's 'Melbourne India Postgraduate Academy' (MIPA) through a partnership with IIT Kanpur, IIT Madras and IIT Kharagpur.

Beyond these existing arrangements, there is limited knowledge of the Indian research environment, according to IRG stakeholders. This limited knowledge prevents administrators and faculty from pro-actively developing research linkages with the appropriate institutions in India. The IRG also found limited knowledge in Australia of how competitor countries are engaging with India in the research space.

The IRG found that Australia has a relatively narrow research collaboration base in comparison to competitors such as the United States which may have its origins in the low level of Indian PhD students in Australia. There have also been limited attempts to partner with other countries in collaborating with India in research.

The Australia India Strategic Research Fund (AISRF) is a symbol of strategic alliance and shared commitment between Australian and Indian researchers. This important platform also facilitate Australia's and India's access to the global science and technology system.

The IES recommended that the AISRF be expanded not just in magnitude but also scope, which would greatly benefit research collaboration<sup>11</sup>. The IRG noted views from stakeholders of their positive experiences working on projects funded by the AISRF, including creation of lasting collaboration between researchers. While the focus of bilateral research has been on STEM, it is now well understood that the solutions to many global challenges require an interdisciplinary approach and that the humanities and social sciences should play a key role.

Given the increased appetite among Australian institutions for research collaboration, the favourable conditions in India with its recent education reforms (including the introduction of six Institutes of Eminence) and prioritisation of international collaboration, Australia is in an opportune position to pursue further research collaboration activity.

### Recommendations

To boost Australia's current research collaboration activity with India, research institutions would benefit from information about research opportunities and viable research partnerships with Indian institutions.

#### Recommendation 8

The Australia India Institute, with support from universities and funding (within existing Government funding envelope), to establish a researcher hub in India that supports two-way student and researcher mobility, builds researcher connections in India, and showcases the quality of Australian research to Indian partners. Developed for and with universities, this hub is expected to be self-sustaining within three years of its establishment.

#### Recommendation 9

Austrade and Department of Education to investigate and profile opportunities for Australian institutions

looking to understand and engage India's research and development priorities. The initial activity would include the International Education and Research Conference to be held in New Delhi and shared insights as part of Austrade's continuing engagement with high quality institutions and leading corporates.

#### Recommendation 10

Research between Australia and India is more than just science. The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science, in consultation with its Indian partners, should explore incorporating liberal arts aspects into the scope of future STEM projects under the AISRF.

#### Recommendation 11

The Australia India Institute, with support from the Go8 and Department of Education, to create a series of case studies on members of the Indian diaspora and other faculty in Australia who are conducting research and engagement activities relevant to India and the Australia/India relationship. This will lead to the development of a body of knowledge on best practise, showcasing Australian capability and catalyse future research collaboration, teaching initiative, and joint programs across the bilateral relationship.

### Building opportunities in the VET sector

Over the last decade, a number of TAFE colleges and several private training providers have entered the Indian skills development market. This activity has largely involved training delivery in India, along with the provision of related services. Notable participants in this activity include the Australian Retail College, UDA (AVTEG Private Limited), AAMC Training Group, and TAFE colleges from Victoria, ACT, New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. The Kangan Institute's work in the automotive industry has received positive

attention and is showcased in the IES. This model of acting as a knowledge partner and consultant on a fee for service basis may present opportunities for the broader Australian training sector, but success only results from long-term engagement, patience and substantial investment of resources.

More frequently, Australian VET provision in India has been dogged by difficulties in finding a viable and feasible market niche when competition is high, price points are low and the workforce and training environment does not suit the Australian model of high quality, industry relevant training.

The IRG heard that the International Skills Training program was developed by the Australian government in collaboration with industry and piloted in India as one response to the difficulty of identifying a viable niche for Australian VET providers in India. Noting the take-up of the courses has been lower than expected in India following their successful pilot in 2016-17, the IRG heard from licensed providers that they were experiencing an inability to achieve break-even price points, and lower than hoped-for demand from Indian government agencies.

Australian providers also described potential interest in expanding the range of IST courses beyond the existing training and assessor courses, including where Indian workers require better skills, but not necessarily any formal qualification. This would be consistent with the emerging trend of micro-credentialing, with the option for "stacking" these towards a qualification. These programs require support from the department or Austrade where Australian providers are aiming for Indian Government subsidies or assistance.

Stakeholders describe the skills landscape in India as being highly complex, regionally varied, and changing rapidly. They noted that it was difficult to develop the comprehensive market knowledge needed to make

a successful approach and they did not feel able to commit the level of resources they felt would be necessary to better understand the landscape based on past experience of wasted resources.

The IES also points to some opportunities where the link between skills investment and return has been clearer and thus prices are higher, such as training for offshore employment or working directly with large Indian corporates. For example, working with international hotel chains or target sectors like healthcare, mining and hospitality where employers and trainees may be willing to pay higher fees or for those seeking employment in third countries (for example the UAE). By partnering with industry for employment pathways or upskilling of existing workforces Australian training providers may secure Indian State Government funding, particularly when coupled with labour hire entities for third country employment.

Providers found this analysis sound but commented that the IES, while expansive in terms of industry coverage, lacks the granularity required by VET providers to spot niche opportunities. They are looking for the 'next layer' of practical information about where and how these opportunities can be found.

The IES's 'priority states' model also attracted attention from VET providers including a belief that it could be a useful framework for providers to consider their approach to India. No consensus has yet developed as to how the priority states model can be put into practice, with providers reporting that the analysis needed to identify which of the priority states to target was beyond their investment reach.

VET providers also reported that there are insufficient incentives to develop collaborative approaches, which was noted by some as a way of defraying the high costs of an approach to the Indian market. The risks attached to developing products and services

<sup>11</sup> Varghese, P *India Economic Strategy*, 2018, p287

for India, alongside problems obtaining information and start-up investment, suggest that consortium-style approaches to VET provision in India might be feasible, but there has been relatively little such activity to date.

There was also discussion of possible inaccuracies in India's perception of the Australia's skills system, for example perhaps an under-appreciation of Australia's strengths in areas such as curricular development and assessment, or in high tech or rapidly evolving industries such as cybersecurity or health.

In addition, Indian students have expectations around cost and employment outcomes that need to be understood carefully. Several participants argued that perceptions within Australia of its own VET system also require attention before VET is marketed abroad.

Although challenged by their experiences in building successful skills businesses in India, Australian providers remain interested in possibilities that remain to be unlocked. The sheer scale of India's need for quality skills training is clear and compelling; the match between Australian strengths and India's is well accepted. However for Australian providers, a move to India, or an expansion of existing engagement, is an investment decision that they do not currently feel able to make. In the face of this market failure, stakeholders reflected on their desire for granular advice from governments to assist them to identify, from the mass of possibilities, viable opportunities that match Australian strengths with Indian needs.

As well as informing and catalysing Australian providers' own investments, providers look to Government to assist in building relationships with Indian governments, which are an important buyer of training services as well as being shapers of the system.

## Recommendations

Australian VET providers are eager to engage with the huge Indian market but want practical advice and support from the Australian Government to help them navigate the large and complex Indian skills environment. Targeted intelligence and government-to-government engagement will assist VET providers move beyond the "Indian price point challenge" to find viable opportunities.

### Recommendation 12

Australian Government to build on existing government-to-government education relationships to develop a specific VET MOU and body of collaborative work with the Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). Early priorities would be:

- VET teacher training (flagged as a priority by recent MSDE delegation) and other areas of capacity development
- Occupational standards development, including building on work undertaken through APEC and the Indian Ocean Rim Association

### Recommendation 13

Austrade, supported by the Department of Education, to lead a review of commercial skills and training opportunities in India. The project will:

- focus on identifying the viable commercial opportunities for VET skills and training development in selected priority states identified in the India Economic Strategy
- look at specific capability needs for the global labour market.
- consider existing Indian capability in relation to VET skills and training development in selected states and sectors, as well as possibilities for collaboration

### Recommendation 14

The Australian VET sector to test the findings of the review and metrics developed above potentially through a sector-led consortia/s to visit key states/regions/cities in mid-2020, supported by Austrade and Department of Education officials in India, to explore opportunities for commercial outcomes.

### Recommendation 15

The Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, to work with India to organise a skills conference in India in 2020 (in parallel with skills delegation/consortia), to explore topics of mutual policy interest, for example, developing TVET workforces or establishing effective VET in Schools programs.

## Methodology

The IRG met six times between October 2018 and June 2019. The meetings provided the Group with an opportunity to discuss the terms of reference, consider the education recommendations in the IES, and to reflect on current engagement and opportunities for the sector to increase engagement.

In addition to its own deliberations, the IRG commissioned a competitor analysis from the Department of Education's team at the Australian High Commission in Delhi and undertook a suite of consultative workshops in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne facilitated by the Director of the Australia India Institute, Professor Craig Jeffrey.



# Appendix

TABLE 1: INDIA ECONOMIC STRATEGY EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	
6. Consistent and deliberate branding to unite fragmentary approach to education marketing in India	6.1 Reposition 'Brand Australia' to improve the perception in India of the quality of Australian education.
	6.1.1 Make India a priority market as part of the global refresh of Australia's education brand in line with the National Strategy for International Education 2025 and Austrade's 'Australia International Education 2025' initiatives.
	6.1.2A 'Study in Australia' education hub should be established in New Delhi based in commercial offices rather than in our diplomatic mission
	6.1.3 Develop annual visits and roadshows to target prospective students, as well as specific schools and universities
	6.1.4 A united Australian approach to education in India should emphasise the quality of Australian education and could also address the problems with agent quality by increasing trust and confidence in Australian education institutions
	6.1.5 The emphasis on quality should be a commitment shared by all Australian institutions marketing in India
	6.1.6 The Australian Government should monitor visa rejection rates, and urge those institutions with high rejection rates to review their approach to selecting quality students.
	6.2 In line with Austrade's global Digital Engagement Review, deliver cohesive, consistent and fit-for-purpose information for Indian students across all online channels, including information available in significant Indian languages.
	6.3 Expand this collective effort to attract Indian secondary school students to attend Australian schools
	6.4 Given the priority assigned to education by Australian state governments, consider establishing a forum for Australian states to discuss with each other their approach to education in India.
7. Increase Australian involvement in the development of Indian curricula	
8. States and territories should develop exchange programs for secondary school students	

9. Attract top Indian students by introducing an 'Alfred Deakin Scholarship' for India	
10. Improve peer to peer marketing	
11. New Colombo Plan funding for India should be maintained	
12. Coordinate with other countries to advocate for increased recognition of non-standard qualifications in India	
13. Industry associations in both countries should work together to recognise qualifications	
14. Encourage India to join the Tokyo Convention	
15. Increase number of twinning programs	15.1 Increase research links by introducing jointly-badged PhD programs with Indian universities 15.2 Introduce short term research intensives 15.3 Universities Australia should explore options for a consortium of Australian universities to partner in the establishment of one of India's six new proposed IITs.
16. Increase financial support for Indian and Australian doctoral students by introducing a Joint Research Fund	
17. Collect reliable data on state of origin from Indian education visa applicants and where they go following study in Australia	
18. Australian universities should partner with business to promote India literacy in Australia through the expansion of Indian studies, including language studies, in Australian universities	
19. Set aside places in Australia Awards for Indian students	
20. Universities, particularly those without a campus in Melbourne or Sydney, should better integrate opportunities for employment for Indian students during their degree	
21. Expand the Indian courses under the International Skills Training program	
22. Australian providers should partner directly with Indian corporates to tailor qualifications based on industry requirements	
23. The Australian Government should advocate for Indian authorities to recognise online courses in both the higher education and vocational sectors	
24. DFAT's Innovation Exchange should promote an 'ideas challenge' to develop online courses that target the skilling of women	

**TABLE 2: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INDIA ECONOMIC STRATEGY EDUCATION Recommendations**

Government action	
Supporting the establishment of research connection hubs in India (recommendation 6)	Academic exchanges between institutions can be a precursor for attracting top international students to pursue postgraduate and doctoral degrees in Australia. In collaboration with universities, the Australia India Institute will develop a hub to support greater researcher and academic mobility, and exchange with India.
Conducting an International Education Forum in India (recommendation 6)	The Australian Government will showcase the quality of Australia's education system at a forum in India in the first half of 2019. This event will bring together providers with government and industry groups to promote trust and confidence in Australian education institutions.
Convening a states education forum on India (recommendation 6)	A forum for Australian state governments will be convened in 2019 to discuss shared approaches to the Indian market, avoid duplication in effort, and coordinate messaging.
Inviting Indian delegates to participate in Australian curriculum projects (recommendation 6)	The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority will engage with Indian officials to showcase Australia's strengths in curriculum design. This will contribute to increased Indian awareness of Australian schooling and higher education options and, over time, alignment to the Australian curriculum.
Introducing an elite scholarships program for Indian students (recommendation 9)	A new scholarships program for high performing Indian students will commence in 2019. The program will help to build links to the talented next generation of Indian business and community leaders.
Developing a roadmap for qualifications recognition (recommendation 13)	The Australian Government will develop a roadmap for understanding and collaborating with India on qualifications recognition. Improved qualifications recognition will raise the perceived quality of Australian qualifications that Indian alumni bring home.
Strengthening linkages between Australian and Indian universities (recommendation 15)	There is an opportunity for Australian universities to utilise regulation provisions which allow for the establishment of twinning programs between Indian and foreign institutions. Expanding the number of twinning programs will support efforts to encourage more Indian students to undertake postgraduate studies in Australia.





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