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Association of Australia

FINAL REPORT

Outcomes from a National
Symposium: English Language
Competence of International
Students | August 2007

November 2007

About This Report

This report was commissioned by Australian Education International (AEI) in the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). It disseminates the outcomes from a National Symposium: *English Language Competence of International Students*, held on 14 August 2007 in Sydney. AEI contracted the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) to manage the Symposium project.

About AEI and DEST

DEST is a department within the Australian Government, tasked with providing national education, science and training leadership. DEST works with states and territory government agencies, industry and the community in support of the Australian Government's objectives.

AEI is the international division of DEST. AEI works to integrate the development of international government relations with support for the international activities of Australia's education and training community.

For further information go to: http://aei.dest.gov.au

About IEAA

The International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) is a lead professional organisation representing members from the higher education, vocational education and training, English language and schools sectors working in international education. Membership is drawn from within Australia and internationally.

For further information go to: www.ieaa.org.au.

Acknowledgements

AEI and IEAA would like to thank the members of the Symposium Steering Group for guiding this project; the consultants who prepared the background Discussion Papers; and the session facilitators and reporters; panelists and the rapporteur for their assistance during the Symposium.

Disclaimer

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In May 2007, Australian Education International (AEI), within the Australian Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), commissioned the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) to plan and deliver a major national Symposium on the English language competence of international students.

Research and commentary in the Australian and international media in early 2007 drew attention to potential failings in the practices of Australian institutions in the selection, admission and teaching of international students.

The Symposium provided the industry with a forum to identify and address the issues impacting on the English language competence of international students and graduates in all education sectors, including pathway students. Options for protecting and promoting the quality of the Australian international students program were also canvassed.

1.2 Symposium Steering Group

The project was guided by a Steering Group comprised of members of the international education industry, academic researchers, a student organisation and government. Membership of the Steering Group is given in Appendix 1.

1.3 Symposium Aims

The aim of the Symposium was to consider evidence about the efficacy of Australian policy and practice in the area of English language preparation, support and competence of international students with a view to identifying possible actions to enhance current knowledge and practice.

1.4 Symposium Participants

The Symposium was attended by 149 invited high-level participants from all education sectors (higher education, vocational education and training, ELICOS and schools). Invitations were sent to all Australian universities, to peak bodies in all education sectors, to relevant Commonwealth and State Government authorities, to auditing, accreditation and quality assurance agencies, and to student representatives, researchers and professional, business and commercial organisations. Organisations represented at the Symposium are listed in Appendix 2.

1.5 Discussion Papers

Recognising that the issues surrounding the English language competence of international students are both complex and intricate, and understanding that media coverage is frequently based on perceptions as much as fact, the Steering Group commissioned three Discussion Papers as background resources for the Symposium. The Discussion Papers were prepared by topic experts and brought together current information and evidence about the issues, with a view to enabling rational examination and discussion of the issues.

The Discussion Papers examined current knowledge and gaps in knowledge about the English language competence of international students, drawing on Australian and international research; discussed implications for Australian policy and practice in this area; and identified critical issues for consideration by participants at the Symposium.

The three commissioned papers were:

Pathways – Preparation and Selection (by Dr Kieran O'Loughlin and Dennis Murray)[1]
In-Course Language Development and Support (by Dr Sophie Arkoudis and Dr Sue Starfield)[2]
Outcomes - Language, Employment and Further Study (by Professor Lesleyanne Hawthorn)[3].

Copies of the papers were provided to participants in advance of the Symposium. The papers will be available on AEI's Market Information Package (www.aei.dest.gov.au) and should be read in conjunction with this Report.

1.6   Symposium Format and Program

The Symposium program is given in Appendix 3. Mr Anthony Fernando, Branch Manager, International Strategy and Communication Branch, Australian Education International, gave the Opening Address at the Symposium. This was followed by presentations on each Discussion Paper by the relevant consultants.

Substantial discussions occurred in six breakout groups working over the major part of the day. The groups were given a shared set of questions to address and to report back on in plenary (Appendix 4).

A panel discussion followed involving six panelists reflecting on the outcomes of discussions. The discussion panel members were:

- Professor Don Markwell, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), University of Western Australia (Chair);
- Mr Lloyd Driscoll, General Manager, Learning and Development, National Institute of Accountants;
- Associate Professor Seamus Fagan, Director, University of Newcastle English Language and Foundation Studies Centre;
- Professor David Goodman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (International), University of Technology Sydney;
- Ms Julie Moss, Managing Director of Photography Studies College;
- Mr Eric Yenz Pang, National Convenor, National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia; and
- Mr Anthony Pollock, Managing Director, IDP Education.

Professor Vi McLean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International and Development), Queensland University of Technology, provided a succinct summation of discussions and future directions.

The conclusions of the Symposium were collated and along with the three Discussion Papers provide the basis for this Final Report. While there were significant variations in opinion by Symposium participants in regard to some matters there was also a broad consensus of opinion in regard to some others.

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[1] Dr. Kieran O'Loughlin is Assistant Dean, International Programs and Anti-Discrimination Advisor, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne. Dennis Murray is Executive Director of the International Education Association of Australia.

[2] Dr Sophie Arkoudis is Senior Lecturer at the Centre for the Study in Higher Education, University of Melbourne. Dr Sue Starfield is Director of the Learning Centre and a Visiting Fellow in the Department of Linguistics, University of New South Wales.

[3] Professor Lesleyanne Hawthorne is Associate Dean International, Director of the Faculty International Unit, and Chair of the Teaching and Learning Quality Assurance Committee at the University of Melbourne.

2. DEFINING THE ISSUES

'English language proficiency' is not only a high profile *impactor* of quality for individual international students. It is also increasingly used as a high profile form of shorthand to make statements about the quality of education providers overall. But it is an imperfect indicator to stand for the quality of education provision.

Vi McLean

The issues embedded in the Symposium's theme – English language competence of international students – are complex and interrelated. In a real sense, the challenge for Symposium participants was to define and to clarify priority issues and to reflect on how they might be addressed.

The Symposium recognised that the quality of Australian international education is not a matter of language testing alone. It is more complex. Moreover, language competence falls within the broader sphere of quality of education provision and in-course support for all students, domestic as well as international. The issues should be seen and dealt with as embedded issues of quality assurance and commitment to all students, across institutions and sectors as a whole.

The complexities involved are a challenge both to understanding and to action.

Broadly speaking, the Symposium asked "what can we do to better ensure the quality of English language provision and related support for international students and who should be responsible"? Where will the balance be found between the responsibility of a single provider to manage its own quality and the shared responsibility of peak bodies and national agencies, including governments, to ensure a measure of quality in common across the industry?

The Discussion Papers each identified a number of important problems and concerns about the English language competence of international students in Australia and suggested that these matters need to be addressed by education institutions, governments, employer and professional groups.

Summary of main issues raised by the Discussion Papers:

Discussion Paper 1

- In many instances, international students may enter higher level studies through pathway programs without completing a formal test of English.

- There are no common exit English standards for pathway programs that allow for direct entry to a main course of study (e.g. from Foundation Studies).

- English language test scores alone do not predict academic success.

- Currently ELT courses are not recognised as leading to vocational or professional outcomes, nor are they covered by any other national framework apart from National ELT Accreditation Scheme (NEAS) standards, which do not define learning outcomes.

- The absence of a clear comparison between the wide variety of English language tests raises serious questions about quality assurance and public confidence in their use for selection purposes.

...cont.

The Symposium was of the view that it would not be prudent for institutions and policy makers in Australia to consider action in isolation. While neither standardised tests nor alternative pathway assessments are perfect, the reality is that English language entry standards in Australia are strongly influenced by the global education marketplace.

At entry level, Australia is not unique in offering a variety of pathways into higher level studies. And, just as many Australian institutions allow for a specified formal English test score as an entry requirement or an assessment taken as 'equivalent' for a direct entry program, so too do many institutions in other countries.

Moreover, no other English speaking country has a national mandatory English language requirement or language curriculum framework that must be completed before entry to a main course of study.

Australia's minimum entry requirements on standardised tests such as IELTS are similar to those used by Canada, Britain and the United States of America, countries with which Australia competes fiercely for international students. In comparison with the U.S. there is actually greater uniformity in overall entry requirements for institutions in Australia.

Australia in fact has a reasonably comprehensive quality assurance system for many aspects of ELT which goes considerably further than quality assurance regimes in other countries.

While not denying that there are issues to be addressed, the Symposium believed Australia should be confident it has a relatively comprehensive and robust quality assurance regime that protects students as well the reputation of Australian international education. No one would claim that it is perfect or that aspects of it cannot be improved. Relatively speaking, however, Australia is ahead of other countries in regard to many of the issues discussed by the Symposium. The fact that a national symposium on these issues occurred at all reinforces a belief that Australia is headed in the right direction in regard to these matters.

> You can have a good industry but it can still face problems. We need to be realistic. We have expectation management to handle.
>
> David Goodman

There was widespread agreement that the Australian international education and training sector needs to show leadership and respond to these issues, both as individual institutions and collectively. As indicated later, some of these matters need to be addressed over a relatively short time frame and a number will require cooperative action by institutions in all sectors, by peak bodies, by employer and professional bodies, and by governments.

> All of us have worried about what (media commentary on some research findings) says about our students and the public perceptions this is reinforcing. There is no denying there is a problem here, with which we need to grapple.
>
> Vi Mclean

The Symposium believed that to be most effective stakeholders need to act in concert to share and exchange information and ideas and to tackle shared problems. There was a strong desire to maintain effective quality assurance at a broadly national level (including for offshore programs) and strong support for cooperative action to strengthen Australia's reputation and position in international education generally.

At the same time, some participants warned against a drift towards greater external regulation. The implication is that institutions and possibly peak bodies must be more vigilant and active in setting standards of English language competence and ensuring they are met.

The Symposium also believed that mechanisms need to be found for communicating to a wider public the evidence in respect of English language competence of international students and for disseminating examples of good practice throughout the industry. Industry needs to be more proactive in responding effectively and collectively to these matters, to ensure its sustainability.

Summary of Key Messages

- The issues of English language competence of international students are complex and interrelated. The complexities involved are a challenge both to understanding and to action.

- The responsibility for dealing with these matters is a shared responsibility of all key stakeholders and all sectors, but of institutions particularly. Addressing these issues is important for the long term quality and sustainability of Australia's international education offerings.

- There is a need for further research to better understand the scale of the issues involved and to evaluate the comparability and effectiveness of different pathways. Some issues, however, need to be addressed over a relatively short time frame.

- Existing quality assurance arrangements effectively protect and promote English language competency and there is an obligation on institutions to ensure that entry standards are consistently applied and that pathway students' English language competency is appropriate for the level of study they wish to undertake.

- There is a strong desire for maintaining effective quality assurance in the provision of English language programs and academic programs at a broadly national level (including for offshore programs) and for cooperative action by all stakeholders to tackle shared problems to strengthen Australia's reputation and position in international education generally.

- There is no support to limit the number and variety of Australian pathway programs leading to higher level studies and very little support for a move to a single, uniform English language entry standard. The issues are widely seen as being too complex to be amenable to a single, simplistic solution.

- There is a strong desire for a strengthening of in-course English language and academic support for international (and for domestic) students.

- International students should be more successfully mainstreamed into the wider student body, both academically and socially.

- There is a need to monitor, evaluate and if necessary take action to ensure that international students maintain an adequate level of English competence during and at the point of completion of study.

- If the industry is to be sustained for the future key stakeholders need to invest the resources required to deliver quality outcomes.

- The need to identify and disseminate information about good practices in English language training and support.

3. SHOULD WE LIMIT PATHWAY OPTIONS?

There was no support from the Symposium to limit the number and variety of Australian pathway programs leading to higher level studies.

Selection and admission into higher level studies in Australia in the VET and higher education sectors involve two types of distinct but overlapping requirements:

(i) the requirement to meet the stipulated minimum academic standards to enter the institution and the course sought; and

(ii) the requirement to meet the stipulated minimum English language proficiency.

Pathway programs provide a diverse, flexible and equitable way for international students to meet these two-fold requirements if they have not gained direct admission.

The disadvantage of such programs lies in the lack of a standardised framework for reporting requirements and outcomes. Currently there is no national framework for establishing and monitoring learning outcomes in pathway programs, including in ELT. Which components of pathways into higher level studies should be common across the sectors in the interest of consistent quality? Where will the balance be found between the responsibility of a single provider to manage its own quality and the shared responsibility of national agencies and government to provide a measure of quality in common across the sector?

While there was no clear consensus reached on these questions by the Symposium, participants agreed that pathways, including English language pathways, are a feature and indeed strength of Australia's international education offerings. Progression through pathways to higher level study has proven to be a very popular mode of entry for international students coming to Australia, and indeed for domestic students.

The landscape of pathways, including English language pathways, may appear complex. The options for an international student are diverse. However, the Symposium confirmed that from a learning point of view broad based preparatory programs, as opposed to programs which focus simply on preparing students to gain a language proficiency test score minimum, better meet the needs of students entering their main course by providing more comprehensive development of English language and academic preparation skills.

A wide variety of pathway options is valued in the Australian context to enhance access and educational opportunity and to help meet the needs of students from a wide variety of cultural, social, educational and language backgrounds. Moreover, competitor countries are increasingly adopting the Australian model of multiple pathways into higher studies for different groups of students.

That having been said, the issues, not the least those involving quality assurance, associated with this complexity of pathway offerings are numerous and should not be ignored.

> We need to preserve flexible entry within a broadly agreed national quality framework.
>
> Breakout group.

4. SHOULD THERE BE A UNIFORM ENGLISH LANGUAGE ENTRY STANDARD?

> We have the world's best regulatory framework to protect students and ensure Australia maintains its high quality reputation. The framework requires education providers to assess that the student's English language proficiency is appropriate for the courses for which enrolment is sought.
>
> Anthony Fernando (AEI), Opening Address

One possible response to recent research and media commentary about alleged failings in the practices of Australian institutions in the selection, admission and teaching of international students is for institutions to move to a single, uniform English language entry standard and to require all international students - onshore and offshore, and regardless of the pathway they are taking - to be tested using a single test or indicator. Is this the right approach to setting English entry standards for our education institutions?

There was very little support from Symposium participants for this approach. The issue is widely seen as being too complex to be amenable to a single, simplistic solution.

The influence of English language competence on future academic performance is not well understood and the current research evidence is sparse and equivocal. While there is little doubt that language competence is an important factor in future academic success, multiple factors, including different cultural and pedagogical approaches to learning, clearly are in operation.

Moreover, the Symposium was generally of the view that a move to a single uniform standard would be likely to skew the focus of preparatory programs towards test preparation and cramming and away from their well established and desirable focus on the comprehensive development of English language and academic preparation skills required for success in higher level studies.

> A question posed by a member of one of the breakout groups was: "If we were to have a single score on a single test as the entry point for all international students, would that solve the problem?" Members of the group were unanimous in saying that it would not.

At the same time, consideration was given to establishing either a "common language framework" or possibly a national EAP curriculum, forms of quality assurance that might provide more uniform standards. There was strong, though not unanimous, support for an approach along these lines.

There was interest in particular in creating a set of national standards for all ELP programs that would go beyond the input measures of NEAS and focus on outcomes measures. This approach was more strongly supported than the notion of creating a single national certificate for pathway programs. The form such national standards should take and the steps needed to be taken to achieve them, however, were not clearly specified.

No consensus emerged around the use of one test, one score, or one curriculum as a measure of English competence. In fact, there was recognition of a need for a suite of tests and indicators for a range of purposes - not just at the point of entry, but for diagnostic purposes along the way, perhaps just before the student begins fieldwork for example, or perhaps at the point of exit for migration purposes.

The Symposium believed the factors affecting successful academic performance are multiple and that the role of English language competence needs to be more clearly identified if policy and practice are to be properly informed.

5. WHAT ARE THE BEST FORMS OF IN-COURSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT?

The desire for appropriate, nationally accepted ELT output standards to assist institutional decision making at the point of selection to institutions and courses was accompanied by an equally strong desire for a strengthening of in-course support for international students.

Clearly, building English language competence requires interventions at points other than prior to commencement of study. The research evidence shows that successful language acquisition takes place over time. The responsibility, of institution and student alike, does not stop when a threshold minimum score prior to entry has been obtained. The Symposium believed that building English language competence is an ongoing matter that must be considered, planned for, resourced and actively encouraged throughout the whole life span of study.

International students' English language competence, academic success and indeed personal well-being and satisfaction are connected not only with a high quality learning environment but with the broader environment – financial circumstances, housing, friendships, interactions with the wider Australian community, entertainment and the networks students make. But there are significant challenges in educational institutions addressing these issues systematically.

> The task at hand is to integrate language and disciplinary teaching and to have evidence-based research that focuses on the benefits for international student learning.
>
> Arkoudis and Starfield 2007

Taking the institutional learning context for one, there was strong interest in and support for the position that learning environments for international students (throughout their studies) need embedded, integrated approaches to English language learning. There was agreement that support services in this area are best delivered not by stand-alone English language proficiency (ELP) specialist learning support staff but by teaching teams that include both ELP and discipline-specialist teaching staff working together.

There was also strong support for two other initiatives – (1) a more generalised use of English language diagnostic tests (for all students); and (2) the embedding of language and academic support within the formal curriculum. The achievement that could be gained by students and institutions through this approach are clearly evidenced through existing research. The Symposium believed the challenge is one of getting this message through to decision makers and budget managers within institutions.

There is an important resource issue associated with this matter. Resourcing is a critical issue for every dimension of education, from concern with the workloads of individual teachers, to the provision of professional development programs for ELT staff. The Symposium was of the view that this educational workforce should be well qualified, appropriately remunerated and highly professionalised. However, there are some concerns especially that the staffing of student support offices, providing essential learning support to international students, might not have kept pace with the number of international students now enrolled in our institutions. This is a matter that requires both further investigation and if necessary rectification.

> We have treated international students as a marginal activity. We don't fund support for them as a mainstream activity. This is something we absolutely have to do.
>
> David Goodman

6. DO INSTITUTIONS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO MONITOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS ON EXIT?

This question was considered in the context of issues such as the contested notion of "decay" of English language competence of international students during the course of study, as well as whether students were achieving the "vocational communication skills" they needed to cope in the workplace.

The Symposium believed that there is a need to monitor, evaluate and if necessary take action to ensure that international students maintain an adequate level of English competence during and at the point of completion of study.

In terms of graduate outcomes, education institutions and the professional communities must work together to identify the particular types of communications skills needed to produce work-ready graduates. Pedagogical strategies need to be designed to help students develop these skills. Importantly, this should be in the context of accountability for learning outcomes of all graduates, not just international graduates.

While there was strong support for a greater focus and accountability for English learning outcomes, there was acceptance that there is considerable complexity around this matter too and that no single solution makes sense. Skilled migration is not the only destination for international graduates (indeed, for a relatively small proportion of international students), it is only one of a multitude of career and life destinations.

> We face a major challenge in trying to prepare international students for 'all of the above', both for careers in Australia and around the world. But this is a challenge we face with *all* of our students – domestic as well as international.
>
> Vi Mclean

7. WHAT RESEARCH IS NEEDED?

The motivation behind the Symposium was a desire for an open and balanced consideration of a complex issue based on available evidence.

Not surprisingly then, an important outcome of the Symposium was the recognition that there are some significant gaps in our knowledge about particular issues. These gaps must be filled to properly inform future action. As indicated in section 9 the prime responsibility to conduct this research lies with institutions and their peak bodies.

The Symposium called for increased cooperation to carry out research across identified priority issues. In particular, tracking the academic outcomes of cohorts of students who enter via various pathways is urgently needed. Some work on this has already begun by institutions for their own purposes. The findings of such research are not generally available or public. It would be useful for institutions and sectors to plan and coordinate such research possibly to enable "aggregation" of the research findings across the sector concerned and if possible across industry more broadly. Such a large data set is needed in order to make properly-informed decisions about the quality of pathways into higher level study.

Benchmarking data within and between sectors, for example in relation to English language pathway programs and subsequent academic success, also would be particularly valuable.

A further key message is that all relevant stakeholders must be brought into the research design and in the research itself.

There was strong acceptance of the need, and a widespread willingness, to share research methodology for tracking student cohorts, data on cohort success rates, and descriptive data on good practice across industry.

At the same time there is a desire for a common "place" in which to store, access and disseminate information on good practice. The Symposium believed that institutions and sectors can learn a lot from each other and that cooperation and sharing of knowledge and experiences and the dissemination of findings and of good practice are all important mechanisms for strengthening the quality and reputation of the Australian international education industry.

A summary of a potential applied research agenda identified by the Symposium is given below. This is not necessarily sufficiently comprehensive or precise. Work needs to be done to refine and to prioritise it. There is good potential for cooperation, refinement and agreement on this agenda, by industry, by governments and by Australian professional organisations and employer groups.

Possible applied research agenda

Short term

- Better, large scale tracking studies of the performance of international students who have undertaken a wide variety of English language pathways.

Medium term

- National benchmarking studies involving all sectors across different measures (e.g. IELTS and for example the wide variety of EAP, bridging and foundation programs used within individual institutions).

- International students' future employment and study trajectories (within and beyond Australia).

...cont.

Possible applied research agenda (cont.)

- The extent to which, from a learning point of view, broad based preparatory programs better meet the needs of students entering their main course, compared with programs which focus simply on preparing students to gain a language proficiency test score minimum.

- Consideration of how much improvement in English proficiency can be expected both in preparatory courses and at the end of higher level studies as well as the relationship with other knowledge and skills areas where improvement is also desired.

- Assessment of the impact of inadequate English on further Australian study (for students progressing to a second tertiary degree).

- Definition of the competencies employers are looking for in international graduates.

- Definition of the level of English required for vocational fields and trades.

Longer term

- Qualitative and quantitative evaluative research on the different models of language support and on the development of student outcome indicators across the sectors.

- Research into the processes and practices involved in developing and maintaining effective collaboration between language support staff and disciplinary staff.

8. WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED AND WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CARRYING OUT THE WORK?

> As a $10 billion industry we have a responsibility and the capacity to take action now, including to fund the necessary research.
>
> Tony Pollock

Resources, whether for international student support services or for research into the complex questions and issues surrounding English language competence, is clearly a critical issue. Decisions about resources are linked to who should be responsible for dealing with the matters for action identified by the Symposium.

There was a clear understanding by participants of the Symposium, that the responsibility for dealing with these matters is a shared responsibility of all key stakeholders, but of institutions particularly and their sector peak bodies. It is with institutions that the confidence placed by the Australian community as well as by international students in the quality of learning and teaching rests.

That having been said, it is always a challenge for institutions to ensure adequate resources are available to serve the legitimate needs of international students and to adequately support the staff concerned and the programs being delivered.

Nevertheless, institutions, and the peak bodies which represent them, clearly have the primary responsibility for ensuring quality practices and outcomes in respect of international students and for providing resources to ensure that this work is done well. This includes supporting research into improvement in policy and practice at a number of levels.

Some of this work could also reasonably be supported by a variety of other groups, in partnership with institutions and peak bodies. Employers and professional bodies have an important role to play. Two clear outcomes of the Symposium in this regard were the need to have employer input into defining the competencies employers are looking for in international graduates and an interest by some employer groups to actively engage with industry and support research in these matters.

Employer data is needed to make judgments about the quality of all graduates, not only international graduates. This goes to better informing institutional policy and programs and is clearly in the interests of employer and professional groups which receive graduates from Australian institutions.

Governments also have a role, selectively, to support industry efforts to effect needed quality improvements in their policies and programs in this area and could reasonably do so, not so much through regulation as by tangible encouragement and support for enhanced quality assurance practices, by helping profile good practice examples and by supporting suitable necessary research to advance knowledge and understanding about needed improvements.

In summary, the Symposium concluded that this is not an industry in crisis, but if the industry is to be sustained for the future key stakeholders will need to see international education as an important site for investment and act accordingly.

9. SUMMARY OF KEY ACTIONS

The aim of the Symposium was to consider evidence about the efficacy of Australian policy and practice in the area of English language preparation, support and competence of international students with a view to identifying actions needed to enhance current knowledge and practice.

A number of key messages and outcomes emerged from the Symposium. These reflect the considered views of industry about how policy and practice reflecting English language competence of international students should be viewed and further enhanced. For the most part, they are widely and strongly supported and are a clear pointer to future action, at institutional, sector and industry-wide levels.

The key messages and outcomes are contained on the one hand in the three Discussion Papers commissioned for the Symposium and on the other in this Final Report, which summarises the main points. These resources should be read in conjunction with one another. They are available online at www.aei.dest.gov.au.

9.1 Proposed Actions

In summary, the key actions proposed by the Symposium were:

Institutional and Program Priorities

- Strengthening of in-course language and academic support for international students (and domestic students).

- A more generalised use of English language diagnostic tests (for all students) including post-entry.

- Embedded, integrated approaches to English language learning. Support services in this area are best delivered not by stand-alone ELP specialist learning support staff but by teaching teams that include both ELP and discipline-specialist teaching staff working together.

- The embedding of language and academic support within the formal curriculum.

- The monitoring, evaluation and if necessary action to ensure that international students maintain an adequate level of English competence during and at the point of completion of study.

Quality Assurance

- Development of more effective mechanisms to audit students' English language entry and academic progression standards (including in courses offered by emerging private sector providers).

- Consideration of the establishment of a set of national standards for all English language proficiency programs focused on outcomes measures.

Research

- A priority research agenda to be determined in consultation with industry, governments and with Australian employer and professional groups.

- Tracking the academic outcomes of cohorts of students who enter via various pathways. Benchmarking data within and between sectors would also be particularly valuable.

- Development of a suite of tests and indicators for a range of purposes – not just at the point of entry, but for diagnostic purposes along the way, perhaps just before the student begins fieldwork for example, or perhaps at the point of exit for migration purposes.

Information Needs

- Cooperation and sharing of knowledge and experiences and the dissemination of findings and of good practice to strengthen the quality and reputation of the Australian international education industry.

- Identification and use of a common "place" in which to store, access and disseminate information on good practice.

Collaboration

- Agreement by stakeholders to act in concert to share and exchange information and ideas and to tackle shared problems.

- In terms of graduate outcomes, education institutions and professional communities to work together to identify the types of communications skills graduates need and to design pedagogical strategies to help students develop these.

- Increased cooperation between stakeholders to carry out research across priority issues. All relevant stakeholders should be brought into the research design and in the research itself.

Public Relations

- Mechanisms to be found for communicating more effectively and collectively to the wider public the evidence in respect of English language competence in international students and for disseminating examples of good practice throughout the industry.

Resources

- Key stakeholders to invest the resources required to carry out the actions above and to ensure quality outcomes are delivered to international students and to the wider community.

Appendices

Symposium Steering Group

Ms Sue Blundell
Executive Director
English Australia

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Executive Director and Vice President: International and Development
University of South Australia
Vice-President
International Education Association of Australia (IEAA)

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Strategic Policy Unit
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Australian Education International (AEI)
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National ELT Accreditation Scheme Limited (NEAS)

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Organisations Sending Participants to the National Symposium

ACL International
Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET)
Asean Focus Group Pty Ltd
Aspect College
Association of Consulting Engineers Australia
Association of Independent Schools NSW
AUSTRADE
Australian Catholic University
Australian College of English
Australian College of Languages
Australian Education International (AEI)
Australian Institute of Radiography
Australian National University
Australian Pacific College & Southern Cross High School
Australian Universities International Directors Forum
Billy Blue College
Bond University
Box Hill Institute of TAFE
Carrick Education
Central Queensland University
Central TAFE
Charles Darwin University
Charles Sturt University
Chisholm Institute of TAFE
CPA Australia
Curtin University of Technology
Deakin University
Department of Employment, Education and Training, NT
Department of Education, Tasmania
Department of Education, Training and the Arts, Queensland
Department of Immigration and Citizenship
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Griffith University
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
IDP Education Pty Ltd
International Education Association of Australia (IEAA)
IELTS Australia
Independent Schools Council of Australia
Insearch UTS
ISANA: International Education Association
James Cook University
Kings College
La Trobe University
LaTrobe International College
Macarthur Anglican School
Macquarie Operations (SIBT)
Macquarie University
MEGT Institute
Meridian International School
Milton College
Monash University

Murdoch University
National Institute of Accountants
National Liaison Committee for International Students in Australia
NEAS Australia
Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE
NSW Department of Education & Training
Photography Studies College
Queensland University of Technology
QUT International College
RMIT University
SA Adelaide Language Centre
Southbank Institute of Technology
Southern Cross University
St.Pauls International School
Swinburne University
TAFE International Education Centre, NSW
TAFE South Australia
TAFE Tasmania
Taylors Colleges
The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia
The OET Centre
Universities Australia
University of Adelaide
University of Ballarat
University of Canberra
University of Melbourne
University of New England
University of New South Wales
University of Newcastle
University of Queensland
University of South Australia
University of Southern Queensland

University of Sydney
University of Tasmania
University of Technology Sydney
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of Western Australia
University of Western Sydney
University of Western Sydney College
University of Wollongong
Victoria University
Victorian TAFE International Inc.
VISION International

ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

« A NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM »

« PROGRAM »

8.00 – 9.00	Workshop registration
Plenary Session	
9.00 – 9.10	**Welcome and Objectives** Dr Anna Ciccarelli, Vice-President, International Education Association of Australia
9.10 – 9.35	**Opening Address** Fiona Buffinton, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Education International
9.35 – 10.45	**Critical Issues and Findings of the Discussion Papers** Project Consultants
10.45 – 11.15	**Morning Tea**
Concurrent Sessions	
11.15 – 12.30	**Workshops – Part 1: Identifying and Prioritising the Issues**
12.30 – 1.30	**Lunch**
1.30 – 2.45	**Workshops – Part 2: Identifying and Prioritising the Way Forward**
Plenary Session	
2.45 – 3.45	**Workshop Groups Report Back**
3.45 – 4.00	**Afternoon Tea**
Plenary Session	
4.00 – 4.45	**Facilitated Discussion – Perspectives on Implications and Actions** Five Member Panel
4.45 – 5.00	**Next Directions** Professor Vi McLean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, International and Development, Queensland University of Technology
5.00	**Close**
5.00 – 6.00	**Symposium Cocktail Reception**

Tuesday 14 August 2007
Sheraton on the Park,
Elizabeth Street, Sydney

Australian Government
Australian Education International

ieaa
International Education
Association of Australia

BREAKOUT GROUPS

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Part I – Key Issues

1. What are the three key messages from each of the Discussion Papers?

2. What are the three critical, priority issues from each Discussion Paper?

3. Why are these priority issues more important than other key issues?

Part II – Solutions

1. What is the best way to improve confidence in exit standards of the wide variety of pathway programs? (ref. Discussion paper 1 – Key issues pp 11, 17, 20 and 25)?

2. How should Australia respond in setting standards for entry to higher studies in the context of what competitor countries are doing?

3. How can good practice in Language and Academic Support (LAS) programs be achieved (ref. Discussion Paper 2 – Executive Summary, p 5)?

4. What should be done to improve language outcomes for international students in terms of employment and further study?

5. What priority research needs to be undertaken to effectively address the critical issues under each of the 3 broad topics? Who should do it? Who should fund it?

6. Who is responsible for quality assurance in the matter of English language competence of international students: (1) at entry; (2) in course; (3) at graduation: and (4) following graduation?

7. How should we respond to the critical priority issues?

   - education institutions
   - education sectors
   - governments
   - Australian employers

Supplementary Question: Are there examples of good practice not identified in the Discussion Papers?