

## Response to the Draft National Strategy for International Education

Australian universities operate in an increasingly internationalised higher education market where global talent is highly mobile. While there is fierce competition to attract the best students and academic and professional staff internationally, Australia's successful and well-regarded higher education sector can continue to expand the opportunity for Australia bringing benefits not only to students and staff but to the Australian economy and society more broadly.

Australia's success in international education is built on quality, which depends on how well it is funded and regulated, and the robustness of its quality assurance. As the international education sector grows, capacity constraints will need to be addressed including in the areas of accommodation, employment, health and transport. Australia's success in meeting these challenges, in turn, contributes to our international reputation in higher education, which is crucial to attracting international students.

The Draft National Strategy for International Education captures the importance of international education for Australia, the opportunities afforded by growing on its success as an export sector and also those areas that will require further work in order to sustainably realise growth. This submission makes a number of recommendations aimed at strengthening the Draft National Strategy for International Education, recognising that there are numerous stakeholders, across government, the higher education sector and the wider community, with a shared interest in working together to ensure Australia builds on its strong education export market.

### The University of Melbourne's approach

The University of Melbourne embraces the opportunities provided by the internationalised higher education sector. The University's international standing is in part built upon the significant contribution made by our large community of international scholars, staff, students and visitors.

The University has agreements with a majority of the world's 50 top-ranked universities. The University also has widespread international collaborations, maintaining over 250 agreements for academic cooperation and exchange with universities around the world, concentrated in the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, China, Italy and India.

In 2013, out of the 30 top ranked universities in the UK, US and Australia, the University of Melbourne had the largest number of international students studying in-country.<sup>1</sup>

International students comprise around 30% of the University's student enrolments and this includes over 12 per cent of the international students enrolled at Victorian universities in 2013, and the largest proportion of international post graduate students, with over 7000.<sup>2</sup>

The University also has the largest outbound mobility program, including through the New

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<sup>1</sup> Top-30 world universities with largest number of international students <http://www.dreducation.com/2015/05/top-world-universities-student-enrollment.html>

<sup>2</sup> uCube <http://highereducationstatistics.education.gov.au/>, 2013 statistics

Colombo Plan, with 2800 students participating in an exchange, study abroad or other international study experience in 2013.

The University invests heavily in services for international students to ensure a quality student experience in Australia. These services include comprehensive academic support for their studies and other services to ensure their health and wellbeing, including supporting high quality student accommodation.

The University is a member of *Universitas 21* and the *Association of Pacific Rim Universities*, both important international networks facilitating collaboration and cooperation between the member universities and creating opportunities for staff and students. The University is host to Asialink, Australia's leading centre for the promotion of public understanding of the countries of Asia and of Australia's role in the region, as well as The Australia India Institute, which plays a key role in strengthening ties between Australia and India.

The University is also developing e-learning platforms, which extends the reach of international education and provides world-class academic and teaching experience to many who would previously have had no means of accessing higher education. In 2013 Melbourne became the first Australian university to offer MOOC courses using the Coursera platform. In 2014 the University's MOOC courses had more than 642,000 students from more than 80 countries, with significant increases in the number of students from China and India.

### Summary of recommendations

Drawing on experience gained from active engagement in international education, the University makes the following recommendations for the Draft National Strategy:

- Articulate specific goals and measures of success, linking them to the strategic actions in the document including maintaining Australia's strong global reputation.
- Outline the level of government resourcing required to support a strong higher education sector that, in turn, can sustain a high quality international education sector.
- Adopt a uniform quality assurance approach to support consistent standards for all higher education providers.
  - This might include reviewing the ESOS National Code to ensure all providers protect international students and Australia's reputation for quality education.
- Recognise in more detail the need for a whole-of-government approach to international education, including policy alignment between government departments that impact achieving the Strategy's objectives.
  - The Draft National Strategy should be integrated within the activity and policy settings of other relevant areas of government, in particular that of Austrade and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
  - In designing and implementing housing and employment policy, governments need to carefully consider the impact on international students.

- Outline specific support measures to drive international collaboration that is critical to the future of Australia's international education sector.
  - For example, specific program support could be introduced to support international research links, similar to the International Science Linkages Program (ISL) which was closed in 2011.
- Commit to regular review of the visa system for it to remain responsive to the international education market.
  - The government should implement simplified guidelines for Skilled Migration and Temporary Activity Visa Programmes and continue to consult with universities as to how the simplified visa system can best support international education and research collaboration.
- Outline measures to provide quality accommodation and services for international students.
  - The government could provide incentives for private development of affordable student housing, using the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) as a possible model, for the development of accommodation for international students.

### **The Importance of international education to Australia**

The University believes that international education contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of Australia and the region, as well as benefiting individual students and their families. It provides opportunities for staff and students to build relationships that last a lifetime, which will be ever more important in a globally connected world.

International students contribute significantly to the Australian economy, with each student generating on average over \$29,000 per year for local business.<sup>3</sup> Every one dollar spent by students on education is matched by at least two dollars spent in businesses elsewhere in the economy. The economic activity resulting from the higher education of international students is estimated to support over 130,000 jobs in Australia, many of which occur outside the education sector.

International higher education means many of the world's most talented people enrich our education system and, should they stay and gain permanent residency, help boost the productivity of our labour markets.

Australia has much to gain by the significant links that each cohort of international students takes with them when they conclude their study in Australia. Our international alumni are one of Australia's greatest assets that over years support political, economic and cultural activities globally.

As it becomes more common for students to select their university on a global basis, Australia is well-positioned to continue to offer high quality education at a competitive price for internationally recognised qualifications. As a destination for study, Australia offers high

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<sup>3</sup> Access Economics 2009, *The Australian education sector and the economic contribution of international students*, Report by Access Economics Pty Limited for Australian Council for Private Education and Training.

quality education, an English-speaking environment and great lifestyle that has contributed to building a strong 'brand Australia' in the international market.

There are immediate challenges to Australian universities including rising international competition and rapid expansion of domestic higher education systems in our major export markets.

To continue to realise the widespread benefits of the international higher education market there is an important role for government in providing supportive policy settings for the international educational sector. A sustainable sector needs appropriate regulation which can ensure quality offerings that meet student expectations while enabling educational innovation by experienced providers.

Universities need stable and predictable financial support for teaching and research as well as targeted programs to drive international collaboration. Government can also ensure policy settings for employment, housing and immigration align with the country's goals for a thriving international education sector.

### **An international strategy needs clear goals and measures of success**

To facilitate the delivery of the Strategy it will be important to include specific actions and measures. For example, while the University broadly endorses the measures of success outlined on pages 20, 37 and 55, greater detail would permit closer monitoring of progress towards the goals set out in the Draft National Strategy.

### **Case Study: The Melbourne-India Postgraduate Program (MIPP)**

The Melbourne-India Postgraduate Program is a joint PhD program with the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Institutes of Technology in Madras and Kanpur. By enabling students from India, Australia and across the world to undertake jointly developed research, the program provides opportunities for students to contribute to the development of educational, cultural and industry links between both countries.

Under the program, the University of Melbourne has allocated over \$3 million over three years to provide 16 PhD living stipend and fee remission scholarships and associated support for researcher exchanges and cooperation. Each of the three Indian Institutes has also invested significant resources and talent through their respective PhD scholarship and research support programs.

The Melbourne-India Postgraduate Program provides opportunities for PhD research training and to increase research collaboration through joint supervision of PhD students enrolled in Melbourne's partner universities. The program benefits India and Australia through research projects addressing shared challenges in areas of environmental, societal and technological need.

The program is aimed at two student cohorts: (1) students previously educated in the Indian institutions and enrolled in doctoral programs at the University of Melbourne, with co-supervision by one of the Indian partners; and (2) students enrolled in doctoral programs at the Indian institutions. Projects can involve collaboration with industry, government and non-government organisations. The Program includes annual research workshops in Australia and India, seminars, peer-to-peer mentoring, joint publication support and internships.

The program has had great successes so far - student enrolments from India have increased in key disciplines, benefiting from sponsorship from industry partners IBM Research in Australia and Infosys, and matched with new industry linkages. The program has celebrated high quality research outputs and annual research workshops held in India and Melbourne.

For example, on page 20 one measure of success is 'greater and more informed student choice'. This could include a more specific indication of what constitutes greater student choice, such as whether this refers to a greater number of providers, a larger number of course offerings, or more diverse modes of delivery.

A greater level of specificity throughout the Draft National Strategy on both the goals and the measures of success would help ensure that government and institutional strategic actions outlined in the document are aligned to achieve the strategy.

The University proposes some key issues that could be addressed in greater detail in the Draft National Strategy and these are outlined in the following sections of this submission.

### **Adequate resourcing to ensure world leading education for students**

Adequate resourcing for universities is critical to delivering world class offerings for domestic and international students. The Draft National Strategy suggests the Government's reform package for higher education policy announced in the 2014-15 Budget is key to providing a sustainable, well-resourced system, while also acknowledging that investment in teaching and learning are the bedrock of the system.

While noting the uncertainty around the passage of these reforms through the parliament, the Draft National Strategy could articulate clearer principles for what constitutes well-resourced and supported international education, including a strong research sector ensuring quality education benefits from the teaching-research nexus. These could include minimum resourcing requirements to deliver quality teaching and learning, as well as a clear indication of what level of support research should receive, such as surpassing average OECD public investment in teaching and research.

Resourcing is also critical to support the aspiration outlined in the draft Strategy (pg 8,10) of improving the performance of Australia's education and research systems as measured by international rankings. Research performance is the primary driver of Australia's university rankings, which in turn is a measure of quality used by international students when deciding where to study.

### **The need for a whole-of-government approach**

The Draft National Strategy has endorsed the recommendations of the Chaney Report. However, the Strategy would benefit from a clearer articulation of how government will effectively support international education through regulation or support across all areas of government policy, not only through education and immigration policy.



Establishing the Ministerial Coordinating Council for International Education will be one initiative for better coordination, but the Strategy could be improved by closer attention to the following areas:

- **Housing and Employment:** The experience and health of international students while studying in Australia depends on their experiences with finding good accommodation and appropriate employment, alongside their course of study. In designing and implementing housing and employment policy, governments need to carefully consider the impact on international students.
- **Interdepartmental coordination at sub-ministerial level:** The success of the Strategy will rest heavily on a shared understanding across departments of the importance of international education as a key export market for Australia - its international standing as a high quality offering, ranked in the top three in the world. Higher education institutions and government must work together to facilitate the recruitment of international staff and students in a seamless, efficient and cost-effective manner. To achieve this, the Draft National Strategy should be integrated within the activity and policy settings of other relevant areas of government, in particular that of Austrade and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

The proposed Ministerial Coordinating Council is one channel through which inter-governmental communication, coordination and collaboration can be advanced across government and, in particular, between the Education, Trade, and Immigration and Border Protection portfolios. This would promote greater consistency in policy and planning.

#### **Case Study: The C-Campus at the University of Melbourne and Tsinghua University**

This cloud-based virtual campus facilitates cooperation in teaching and learning and in research between the University of Melbourne and Tsinghua University, one of China's top universities.

The C-Campus leverages the expertise of two leading institutions in a platform for co-operation across research, online education and innovation. The arrangement was formalised under a bilateral partnership agreement in 2014.

An initial focus has been a suite of new online classes for graduate engineering students at the two universities. In 2014 the first C-Campus subject on River Basin Management was delivered simultaneously in both countries as an intensive with lecturers from both universities and larger than anticipated numbers of students. Following the online classes, the Melbourne students visited China to meet up with the Tsinghua students for site visits and further discussion. A second subject on data mining and analysis will be delivered in 2015.

C-Campus classes are truly collaborative. They are designed, developed and delivered in partnership between the two Universities, with responsibilities shared by academics at each institution, bringing their complementary expertise and deepening their existing relationships. Students participate in synchronous video-linked classes with their counterparts at the other institution. They hear from leading scholars and practitioners in Melbourne and Beijing. And they interact directly with their counterparts outside class on team assignments.

The C-Campus has helped develop a deeper understanding of a range of issues relating to teaching and learning in a cross-cultural context, both for the academics developing the subjects and for the students undertaking them. Melbourne and Tsinghua academics are working together on effective pedagogies for online learning in this new context.

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## Driving international collaboration

The Draft National Strategy recognises the importance of international collaboration for both the direct benefits it provides but also the importance it has generally for the health of the international student sector in Australia. Strong collaboration across borders between governments, universities and individual academics is critical for enabling joint projects and for the longer term relationships it builds. Specific suggestions include:

- **Targeted programs:** Targeted programs that provide seed funding for collaboration have been successful in the past. Programs to support international research links, such as the International Science Linkages Program (ISL) which was closed in 2011, help establish long-term collaborations.

The Draft National Strategy could include similar measures to drive collaboration between institutions, through both seed funding and funding for longer term collaborations.

- **Targeted support for international student internships:** Internships offer the opportunity for both inbound and outbound students to gain valuable international experience, improve graduate employability, foster knowledge transfer between countries and create links between economies.
- **Counsellors:** The Commonwealth's international network of counsellors has been an important mechanism to build collaboration.

The University supports the current work of the counsellors and recommends the Strategy allocate any additional funds for other complementary programs including programs which seed funds for collaboration.

## Reforming the visa system

The University of Melbourne welcomes the Government's ongoing efforts to reform the visa system as it relates to international students and visiting academic staff. However, some further necessary reforms are required.

The Skilled Migration and Temporary Visa Programme framework should be simplified and streamlined into three categories as proposed by the government - Work, Business and Activity - combining activities with similar characteristics into a single visa-subclass.

Guidelines and rules for visas should accommodate the needs of students and educational institutions. For example, when setting visa processing charges, consideration should be given to the number of applicants likely to be supported by each institution within each visa category, so that costs are not prohibitive and remain at a level where they constitute a small proportion of the overall cost burden of recruiting and supporting an overseas employee. This is particularly relevant where the role of the sponsoring organisation is that of a 'host' rather than an 'employer'.

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## **Ensuring the best possible accommodation and services for international students**

Adequate student accommodation is critical for international students, yet providing this is often beyond the available resources of universities and other higher education providers, despite the significant investments already made by the sector.

Current international student numbers growth rates will likely put strain on the capacity of the housing markets near universities, especially in the inner cities where there is already a lack of suitable accommodation. Australia risks student numbers expanding at an unsustainable pace, where there is a clear need to find a sustainable balance between growth and the necessary infrastructure and services.

If the Strategy supports continued growth rates, it could usefully develop new measures to promote provision of enough quality student accommodation to meet the needs of international students. For example, the Government might consider a scheme based on the National Rental Affordability Scheme, which provides incentives to private investors to develop new housing stock. A similar scheme of incentives to build accommodation for international students would be an investment in the future of Australian international education.

## **Maintaining Australia's global reputation**

Maintaining Australia's excellent reputation as a destination for international students is critical for the health of the whole sector. Australian universities have the advantage of statutory quality assurance regulation through TEQSA and the ESOS framework. For its part, The University of Melbourne remains committed to rigorous entry standards and verification of entry credentials. The University has robust processes to ensure prospective students are correctly credentialed, particularly with regards to academic transcripts, completion statements and English results. The University's overseas agents meet all the requirements set by the Australian government's streamlined visa processing standards.

The Draft National Strategy could include an approach that would ensure these same standards are met by all higher education providers. This might include reviewing the ESOS National Code to apply to all providers to protect international students and Australia's reputation for quality education.

## **The growing importance of online education for international education**

The University welcomes the Draft National Strategy's recognition that increasingly, competition in international markets will be driven not only by students travelling to undertake study in a destination country such as Australia, but also by online education offered by leading institutions able to cater to global markets.

While the Draft National Strategy incorporates the Government's response to the Online Higher Education Working Group's report *Higher Education in the Digital Age*, the Strategy could better recognise the implications the growth in online education could have for the international student sector within the next few years. The Strategy might also recognise the need to boost support for innovation in online education through increased funding to develop innovative programs that will benefit the whole sector.