



ISANA SUBMISSION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JOBS, PRECINCTS AND REGIONS (Victorian Government)

Discussion paper: Refresh of the International Education Sector Strategy

In 2016, the Victorian Government released its International Education Sector Strategy (the Strategy) following extensive consultation with student organisations, international education sector stakeholders and organisations, the Victorian International Education Ministerial Advisory Roundtable and the Future Industries Ministerial Advisory Council

The Strategy included 44 initiatives under four themes:

- 1. Sustainable growth across the international education sector**
- 2. Quality, innovation and outstanding student experience**
- 3. Market development and showcasing Victoria to the world, and**
- 4. Collaboration and broader benefits of international education.**

Since the launch of the Strategy, Victoria has continued to see strong growth in the international education sector. This growth, coupled with changes to the geopolitical landscape and increases in some markets being offset by flattening in others, has increasingly required the sector and government to grapple with questions of capacity and the need to diversify Victoria's international student cohort. **Diversity is more critical than ever to ensure that the sector is resilient to shocks and downturns and can continue to grow sustainably.**

In this context, the Victorian Government is considering its role in supporting long-term growth of the international education sector and its priorities for the next four years. While the four themes of the 2016 Strategy still hold, **it is proposed that the theme of sustainable growth be elevated in the refreshed Strategy, noting that this goal is at the centre of most government activity in the sector.** At the same time, the focus on maintaining quality, innovation and outstanding student experience, market development and communicating the broader benefits of international education to the Victorian community should be refined, noting the contextual changes facing the sector and limited resources available to government.

Purpose of the discussion paper and how information gathered during the consultation process will be used

The Department JPR is seeking submissions to inform the refresh of the Strategy under consideration by government. Submissions will not be made publicly available and will be treated in confidence. Organisations are invited to respond to the consultation questions against one or multiple themes by Monday 30 September 2019.

About ISANA: International Education Association

ISANA: International Education Association is the national professional association that represents people working with international students in Australia. It is a well-respected membership body that has provided services to international students and the professional staff who work with them since 1989. ISANA is a voluntary organisation, comprising a National Council, State and Territory branches and a general membership, with all office

bearers elected by members. The association plays a key role in contributing to improving international student experience through policy and practice.

ISANA members work in universities, colleges and schools as well as with public and private organisations, making it unique as a cross-sectoral body engaging effectively with people working directly with students. Members are employed in administration, student support, compliance, policy, teaching and teaching support, in management and international education leadership roles as well as in service providers.

ISANA has a dynamic relationship with groups whose responsibilities connect with international students' experience. It has a demonstrated record of collaboration with relevant organisations such as student representative organisations, government agencies, accommodation providers, police, fire, health, insurance, emergency services, community organisations and guardians. It is therefore responsive to issues that arise such as cultural adjustment, academic progress, health and wellbeing, safety and security, as well as the needs of younger students.

ISANA has always taken an active interest in the development of government and institutional policy, and the impact of policy on international students. ISANA was granted a 2018 Enabling Growth and Innovations grant to develop an updated instructional Tutorial on the 2018 National Code and has also received grants for various international student support Projects under the Student Welfare Program. It has engaged with government through a number of taskforce and consultative groups, contributing to dialogue relating to international student matters.

1. Overall Strategy

1. How can the Victorian Government best support your organisation to achieve its future international educational objectives?

The Victorian Government can best support ISANA in several ways. These include the following:

- invite ISANA to participate in relevant sessions/ discussions/ presentations alongside other Peaks and organisations
- continue to make grants available that ISANA may apply for
- allow access to resources/premises and encourage collaboration between ISANA and the Victorian government
- initiate and facilitate connections for ISANA where collaborations would benefit students, stakeholders and government and result in cost efficiencies as well as enhance effectiveness of strategies
- contact ISANA during decision making processes for input and background
- share information with ISANA
- help us raise our profile

2. Where do you see a key role for government and feel that government can add the most value in the sustainable growth of the Victorian international education sector?

It is important for the Victorian government to set the narrative on international education. Government needs to talk about benefits international students bring to the community and cite concrete examples. It is important for the wider community and business to understand the peripheral 'add-on' benefits e.g. tourism from visiting families; post-study visas which allows Australian trained students to give back to the Victorian community. It is for government (State and local) to bring the community onboard by dispelling myths around international education being a drain and impost on resources.

Government can also initiate and facilitate a marketing campaign set up to educate international students about their work rights post study and simultaneously a campaign to industry explaining how the transitional visa works. Also, educational providers should be running campaigns in line with state government initiatives so that everyone is clear on career expectation and the impacts on the local community to mitigate negative dialogue.

3. Can you suggest any changes to the Strategy which would improve its effectiveness?

The International Education Strategy sets the agenda for government and business in the sector. It is therefore important for Government to lead on this. A focus solely on recruitment and economic value ignores the human face of international education. The Strategy should rephrase the language and context used e.g. rather than saying ‘...and ascertain whether there is adequate infrastructure in place to support international students as a growing cohort of the Victorian population with distinct vulnerabilities and needs.’ write ‘..with the growth in international education the Victorian Government has contributed X in additional resources which has benefited the entire community and is aimed at supporting all sections deemed vulnerable or those with special needs...’

2. Quality, innovation and outstanding student experience

1. As the number of international students in Victoria continues to grow, how can government best support the sector to ensure quality in Victoria’s education offering is maintained?

The Victorian government should continue to look at good practices in institutions and organisations and offer templates for others to adopt. This strategy reflects well on government as leading best practice across the sector.

Government and its international education agencies must maintain support of ESOS to avoid it being watered down e.g. under Standard 14 of the National Code 2007, it said ‘The staff of registered providers are suitably qualified or experienced in relation to the functions they perform for students’. This has been removed under the National Code 2018. The Victorian government can set the standard for education providers to not only be compliant to the ESOS Act and National Code but set the benchmark for quality.

Government can provide access to templates and resources to ensure small providers can best support their students and suggest a benchmark of support levels required across all sectors of the industry. In addition, government should continue to engage and educate employers on the benefits of hiring international students post-study.

Where there is likelihood of changes to State legislations, government should grandfather relevant sections in State legislation that international students have taken into consideration when choosing to study in Victoria, so they are not disadvantaged under subsequent changes or are put off by the possibility of future changes.

The government should have a detailed support plan that can be rolled out if a provider closes and this should be publicized to all education agents. This would indicate to agents who recruit students on behalf of providers in Victoria that the government cares about the students and their families. It provides students with assurances that their education and lives matter in Victoria.

International students reside, work and play across Victoria. However, all too often, the narrative in media is one of overcrowding on public transport and blaming international students and their families for increased pressure on public infrastructure and rising costs in the rental market. International students bring a multicultural vibrancy to Melbourne and surrounding suburbs. Where possible, community cultural education

sessions, social media and features in mainstream media should be facilitated so that the cultural and intellectual benefits of international education are noted and promoted.

2. How could the Strategy better support your organisation to deliver an outstanding student experience?

ISANA would appreciate the Government through the Strategy assist organisations like ISANA to access networks to raise our profile so that we may circulate information and resources for the benefit of the sector. ISANA would also benefit from that circulated by other bodies.

The Strategy should continue to provide support with the co-ordination and supervision of International Student Welfare Programs, Award Ceremonies and other events and activities for international students. Lead the development and coordination of international student initiatives and provide operational support to ISANA members supporting these students in delivering initiatives that are directly related to consistency in enhancing the student experience across Victoria.

3. What is the role for government in working with organisations across Victoria to ensure that international students are engaged and included in the Victorian community?

The Government could facilitate the positive engagement of international students by first identifying all relevant stakeholders. It's amazing what can be happening in the community that many are not aware of. Encouraging and supporting these initiatives as well promoting them amongst students, education and accommodation providers and the broader community would facilitate greater social engagement.

Through its agencies such as Study Melbourne, the government could facilitate a 'one-stop' network and communication point without censorship. Including student and community groups in this network would also potentially encourage better engagement. Through the Hub and Study Melbourne, the government could also assist with resources e.g. templates, collating/interpreting legislation requirements, benchmarking, good practice sharing.

When recently judging the VIEA the applicants had actioned some remarkable achievements and built social media tools to engage other international students in their area of discipline. It would be good to somehow harness this and share it across the state of Vic. It is also noted there is a bottleneck with the Study Melbourne marketing and communication plan as they currently have over 50 active projects through the welfare grants program alone, and their communications team also must support all the initiatives they offer. Therefore, there are resourcing challenges with the agency unable to guarantee they will choose to promote a certain content piece. This is where great ideas and sharing opportunities are missed.

4. What role do you see for government in fostering education technology and education innovation in Victoria?

Without utilizing and sharing the innovative social media tools and ideas that are being designed and thought of by ISWP recipients, this is a missed opportunity for state government as this creativity is not showcased and could easily go through the cracks.

3. Market development and showcasing Victoria to the world

1. How could the Victorian Government best support your organisation to diversity student source markets, courses, and products?

The government can best support ISANA by facilitating our working in partnership with educational providers.

2. What is your organisation's level of engagement with the Victorian Government's Global Education Network (Education Services Managers) and how could the Global Education Network better add value to the business of your organisation offshore, particularly in providing access to emerging markets and regions?

3. How could government better support Victorian TAFEs to strengthen onshore growth in international student enrolments and to access offshore opportunities?

For TAFE the key to effective innovation systems is an operating quadruple helix: state, industry, the knowledge sector and civil society collaborating, each with their own position of strength, to achieve something that is bigger than the sum of its parts. It would require state government to take on more of the entrepreneurial role. It would require industry to recognise that competition and collaboration are the two sides of the same coin, that governments and the tertiary sector are not their common enemies and that dialogue can be constructive and productive.

4. What is your organisation's level of engagement with Study Melbourne marketing, communications, brand and reputation management platforms and activities, and how could Study Melbourne better add value to the business of your organisation, onshore and offshore?

There is a bottleneck with Study Melbourne marketing and communication plan as they currently have over 50 active projects through the welfare grants program alone, and their communications team also has to support all the initiatives they offer, so they can't ever guarantee they will choose to promote a certain content piece. This is where great ideas and sharing opportunities are missed.

5. Where do you see an opportunity for capacity building or growth for the international education sector in regional Victoria and how can government assist in this?

The Victorian government is responsible for infrastructure and urban and regional planning. With increasing numbers of international students choosing to study in Victoria and Melbourne in particular, the government should support public transport options and help students and their families find safe affordable housing. The Strategy should also actively prepare regional communities to receive international students. This could be via increased funding for infrastructure including public transport, facilitating sharing of resources from agencies that have experience in supporting international students and working closely with local government and businesses to grow industries that can employ skilled international student graduates.

The Strategy should encourage regional-based international students to run campaigns to their educational and social networks back home. Word of mouth (so to speak) marketing is very effective. It is therefore important that regional-based students and their families have positive experiences. These experiences include their study, work and play. The government should also augment the federal government incentives that encourage students to regional areas. We should also be encouraging outbound and inbound mobility across Victoria.

4. Promoting collaboration and the broader benefits of international education

1. How could a government initiative (e.g. the Victorian International Education Awards) increase your organisation's capacity to promote the broader benefits of international education within and beyond your organisation?

These awards provide the government with an opportunity to shine the 'spotlight' on a group/organisation each month to promote and highlight their work and achievement. The awards also highlight the non-financial benefits and contributions that international students give to the community. The roll out of positive stories rather than a one-off media release can promote the broader benefits of international education.

These awards should also provide financial reward alongside the certificate and recognition should be given for ongoing or new projects that have the broadest impact and benefit.

The scope of the Awards should be broadened. The top students should be selected from HE, VET, TAFE, Foundations Studies etc. International students enrol across all of these sectors but only a few are represented in the awards. An evaluation of the process by the international students that have put in an application would be good as well.

2. How could government collaborate with employers and industry groups to build stronger links with the international education sector, including students?

A positive graduate outcome is a key indicator for students when evaluating their overall experience. The government should take a leading education role with businesses and the media on student visas and post-study work-right requirements.

The Government should release statistics in a meaningful way to dispel hyperbole and misinformation on international students. The statistics should include how an increase in international students have positively contributed to new research discoveries, increased facilities, new businesses and infrastructure that benefits the whole community. All too often the information on international education is limited to overall student numbers and the economic contribution to the state.

If the State government would like to build stronger relationships with industry, it must first be an exemplar and advocate for international education. Recruiting international student graduates, facilitating internships and Work-integrated learning experiences are positive strategies. The government can also facilitate the recruitment of international students through collaborative projects and financial incentives.

3. How could Victoria better support industry to leverage the international student talent pool, or attract talented individuals with in-demand skillsets to further their studies in Victoria?

ISANA suggests the government offer an initial fully paid internship of 3-6 months that attaches to the student to increase employer competition to offer employment for a minimum of 12 months.

ISANA also recommends that Victoria continue to have a central site with all the must-have information for employers including testimonials from both students, employers and the clients they interact with. The Study Melbourne site must be more actively promoted across the business sector.

4. What role do you see for government in supporting engagement with international student alumni post-graduation?

Through Study Melbourne, the government could offer a central point of triage for alumni who seek information or assistance on any topic.

International men and women have gone on to serve the community and provide outstanding leadership in a wide variety of fields: engineering, medicine, law, politics and the public service, business, Church, university and schools, in the arts, science and other avenues of life. They have made an exceptional contribution to the community in Victoria, Australia and internationally. This requires a designated person/agency to capture and manage these relationships.

5. What is the role of government in supporting the growth of the education tourism industry?

The government should set the standards in order to prevent exploitation and benchmark a base level of quality of offerings.

In addition, government should undertake the following:

- Co-ordinate and continuously improve student engagement activities ensuring liaison across Study Melbourne with student enrichment (including student representative opportunities/committees, focus groups, events and student activities)
- Provide leadership and supervision of Programs on a need's basis.
- Monitor the services provided against international students' evaluations and, as appropriate, provide and implement changes in areas requiring attention. Provide insight into the student experience to strengthen the focus on enhancing engagement.
- Undertake research and analysis activities in liaison with relevant stakeholders to produce regular reports on key projects and initiatives relating to the student experience.
- Advise staff members supporting these students of important matters related to student experience. Ensure planned and timely communication with relevant stakeholders across Victoria.
- Management and publication of weekly international student Newsletters i.e could include progress/updates on currently funded ISWP programs.

Conclusion

ISANA as an active professional network, is in a privileged position to observe issues, evaluate programs and initiate solutions, particularly in relation to the experiences of international students. Our collective historical knowledge and capabilities can be used to develop and facilitate the conditions needed to better understand the issues our international students face and the opportunities they afford and, as many of our members operate in organisations other than education institutions, we are well equipped to advise on these matters. We look forward to contributing further in this area.

Bronwyn Gilson
National President
4 October 2019