

International

November 2010

Key proposals

- In view of the damage done to Australia's image abroad as a welcoming country that is open to ideas, it is imperative and urgent that the nation's political leaders proclaim the importance of international education. The Prime Minister must make a formal statement and the Opposition Leader should support it.
- The statement should focus on the importance of international research collaboration for Australia to remain competitive and should emphasise the importance of international students to Australia's economic, social and cultural development.
- Policy settings around student and academic visas should welcome talented people from all over the world, not act as a barrier to their entry to Australia.
- To safeguard the reputation of Australia as an education destination, the Government should promote the diversity of education opportunities in Australia.
- Much more action is necessary to strengthen Australia's participation in international research, including through enhanced scholarships and a successor program to the International Science Linkages Program and related measures.
- A more coherent approach is needed in Government policies, programs and marketing campaigns relating to international education across the multiple government agencies involved, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Austrade, the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science and Research (DIISR), the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

Issues and challenges

International education, particularly study in Australia, provides significant economic benefits for Australia. It is both a major export industry and a source of domestic economic growth. Around one quarter of all higher education students in Australia are international students. International student fees more than cover costs of study and account for some 16% of total higher education revenue. Any decrease in this source of funding represents a challenge to Government as it is currently subsidising many other teaching and research activities in Australian universities. International student fees make up between 7% and 18% of the annual operating expenses of Go8 (Group of Eight) universities. At one non Go8 university international student fees makes up 44% of total operating income.

However, international education is much more than a business. The relationships formed through international education underpin Australia's engagement with the world, and help sustain goodwill, trade and investment. If Australia can attract talented international students through scholarships and a reputation for quality, they will return to their home countries to become leaders in government, industry and the arts and ultimately help open doors for Australia.

These relationships provide access to new ideas and technologies that underpin national innovation. They make our creative and intellectual assets more visible to other countries, and create ties of mutual advantage. They are the basis of future research collaboration. International students bring talent to Australia and help to widen the outlook

of Australians.

The Go8 wants to work with Government to ensure that international education in Australia is attractive for its quality rather than as merely a path to migration.

We want to work with Government to correct the severe damage being done to Australia's image abroad. The received message in other countries—among students, parents and others- is that Australia does not value international students.

It is imperative to balance tighter immigration rules with support for the genuine student market. But this needs to be balanced with strong messages about the value of international education.

Australia cannot afford to be isolated or by-passed in a more knowledge-connected world. Our future will rely on strong international connections and openness. We cannot allow a decline in Australia's reputation to gather momentum.

Solutions

1. A major statement by the Prime Minister on the importance of Australia's engagement in international education and research.
2. High-level meetings in major source countries by relevant senior ministers and education leaders.
3. Removal of student visa entrants from the Government's net immigration goals.
4. Review policy settings for student visas, with regulation proportional to risk.
5. A joined-approach by the Government across its policy departments and administrative agencies.