

## Introduction

Independent Higher Education Australia IHEA represents the majority of Australia's registered and accredited independent higher education and dual sector providers, including all of Australia's independent universities, and has members with campuses across Australia.

IHEA members educate students in a range of disciplines including Law, Engineering, Agricultural Science, Architecture, Business, Accounting, Tourism and Hospitality, Education, Health Sciences, Theology, Creative Arts, Information Technology and Social Sciences.

IHEA members operate with both for-profit and not-for-profit business models, and educate domestic and international students in undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The Australian independent higher education sector comprises more than 140,000 students and 120 institutions, with independent providers variously accredited to offer courses across the full AQF range (undergraduate certificates to doctorate).

IHEA is an active member in the international student space participating in a number of forums and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper.

## **Background to this Submission**

The Victorian Government is developing a longer-term plan to drive recovery and a return to growth for our international education sector.

Following the Commonwealth Government's release of its new Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030, a national framework is now in place for multiple tiers of government and industry to work together on driving recovery. Victoria's plan will take into consideration the national strategy, while also pursuing a distinct vision for our State.

This submission outlines what we say in relation to the International Education Strategy, and also specific feedback on the role the Victorian Government can play in supporting this.

1. [Maintaining Victoria's reputation as a world-class study destination](#) What are the most significant risks and opportunities with respect to Victoria's reputation as a desirable international study destination? How can government work with stakeholders to best manage the sector's reputation in response to the protracted impacts of COVID-19? How can Study Melbourne best position itself in the post-pandemic international education market?

Prior to COVID-19, Australia and Victoria were attractive destinations for international students. In fact, international education was Australia's third largest export industry. International education was worth some \$12,792 billion nationally. Victoria had the second largest share of the international student market valued at \$12,972 billion just after NSW at number one at \$13,378 billion<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ieaa.org.au/about-us/sector-stats>

COVID-19 has caused Australia's international market to be negatively impacted. IHEA members mostly experienced a down turn in international enrolments, particularly new enrolments and those from off shore. This was in part due to the closure of borders but also the real perception that Australia is not open to international students. Other countries such as Canada and the UK were seen as more open to international students. This has resulted in an increase both countries market share<sup>2</sup>.

What can be done to support the sector in response to the impacts of COVID-19? How can Study Melbourne best position itself in the post pandemic international market?

Targeted marketing in existing markets using the whole of government approach. This means a range of government agencies (and industry) working together to rebuild Australia's international education industry. The marketing would be able to convey the message that Australia is 'open for business' similar to the Tourism Australia campaign in Paris at present<sup>3</sup>.

2. Seizing opportunities for onshore and offshore growth through collaboration with global partners. What partnership and delivery models are anticipated to be in greatest demand from offshore partners in the medium- to long-term? How can providers shape their future offerings (e.g. joint programs, short courses, articulation arrangements, in-country delivery) to better meet the needs of diverse student segments and the global labour market? What international education markets are the most prospective for Victoria in the medium- to long-term, both established and emerging? What are the most significant risks associated with diversification from the current offering?

Some of IHEAs members have been successfully delivering transnational education. Anecdotally members report that they would like to be more involved in transnational education. IHEA members support the approach by the Federal Government as written in the Australian Strategy for International Education 2021-2030<sup>4</sup>.

What has precluded some members from entering the transnational education market is the confusion around the regulatory regimes. With the rise of online learning, the future of the market remains puzzling for both providers and the regulatory departments. For example, at the time of writing, one IHEA member, the Australian Institute of Business (AIB) successfully runs its courses online for offshore students. It remains the largest online provider of MBAs<sup>5</sup>. Another model of transnational education is that of another IHEA member SP Jain who successfully runs its MBA course successfully through four different countries and campuses<sup>6</sup>. The possibilities for transnational education remain for IHEA members.

IHEA institution members may be able to shape their future offerings if the regulatory framework is clearer. In addition, support from Austrade in this regard is imperative.

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<sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/211124/dq211124d-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tourism.australia.com/en/news-and-media/news-stories/australia-welcomes-back-parisians.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dese.gov.au/australian-strategy-international-education-2021-2030>

<sup>5</sup> [https://online.aib.edu.au/amp/mba-online-auslp/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=aus-brand-em&utm\\_term=aib&utm\\_content=mba&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlp6Ovrc7W9gIVxxwrCh2vmQu6EAAYASAAEgIeS\\_D\\_BwE](https://online.aib.edu.au/amp/mba-online-auslp/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=aus-brand-em&utm_term=aib&utm_content=mba&gclid=EAlaIqobChMlp6Ovrc7W9gIVxxwrCh2vmQu6EAAYASAAEgIeS_D_BwE)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.spjain.edu.au/>

In terms of international education markets most prospective while the Indian subcontinent is extremely important. It is noted that Australia and India are close to signing a mini free trade agreement<sup>7</sup>. There are other emerging markets as identified by DFAT such as:

- Fiji
- Vietnam
- Indonesia and
- Sri Lanka<sup>8</sup>.

Significant risks remain the geopolitical challenges, changes to visa offerings coupled with real risk that with diversification, the current student offerings that is traditional face to face learning may be affected or sidelined.

3. Enhancing the student experience for international students studying with Victoria How can Study Melbourne best enhance the end-to-end student experience – from prospective students’ first consideration of Victoria as a destination, through their experience during study and transition into the workforce (in Australia or overseas)? What are the most significant barriers to a positive end-to-end experience with Victoria and how can they be addressed? What opportunities does regional Victoria present to the sector? What are the challenges in pursuing such opportunities?

International students may face challenges with respect to pre-arrival and then arrival into Australia. A number of members report that their students are unfamiliar with particular nuances of Australian society. For example, water safety<sup>9</sup> was previously identified as a risk with international students together with employment issues.

Some significant barriers that may arise (but not limited to) include;

- being susceptible to scams including immigration scams<sup>10</sup>;
- mental health issues and isolation<sup>11</sup>;
- rental rights and costs, Melbourne rents have recently hit record highs<sup>12</sup>; and
- exploitation in the workplace<sup>13</sup>.

These may be mitigated by the following strategies;

- greater information provided to prospective and actual students prior to arrival in Australia. These would include more fairs, social media presence, tik tok videos. While there are some videos online at present. They are often done by the students themselves rather than Study NSW or Study Melbourne<sup>14</sup>. One example of an official tik tok page is the University of NSW<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/17/india-and-australia-close-to-signing-a-mini-free-trade-agreement>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/news/dfat-establishes-emerging-markets-impact-investment-fund-emiif>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/why-are-swimming-skills-so-important-for-all-australians>

<sup>10</sup> <https://studee.com/discover/the-ultimate-guide-to-international-student-scams/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/english/audio/multicultural-campaign-aims-break-down-barriers-to-youth-mental-health-support>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/property/news/melbourne-house-rents-the-nation-s-cheapest-despite-new-record-high-20220112-p59nq1.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/fact-sheets/rights-and-obligations/international-students>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/discover/student-life-australia?lang=en>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.inside.unsw.edu.au/innovation-and-engagement/unsw-australias-first-university-on-tiktok-hit-one-million-engagements>

- connecting with the larger Australian community on the benefits of international students including advice on the numbers of hours which can be worked.

Regional Victoria is booming at the time of writing. The cost of living including housing is lower than Melbourne CBD. In addition, students may be eligible to apply for a Skilled Work Regional Provisional Visa Subclass 491. This allows international students a potential pathway for permanent residency<sup>16</sup>. The challenges for regional Victoria are to ensure that;

- Former international students stay and contribute to the region after obtaining their permanent residency;
- Former international students are gainfully employed rather than confined to service entry jobs or other jobs unrelated to their qualifications; and
- That there is adequate infrastructure to support the new arrivals.

Regional Victoria could also position itself as a destination of choice for pathway programs. These pathway programs provide bridging qualifications to higher education giving international students a transition between high school and tertiary studies. This may be done via tax incentives or offering investment inducements to attract providers to the region via setting up of campuses and the like. This would also drive employment in the region.

4. [Positioning Victoria as a world-leader in education technology \(edtech\) and innovation](#) How does government, education providers and industry best position itself to maximise the opportunities presented in education technology and innovation? What are the barriers currently preventing Victoria's international education sector from increasing its volume of international students studying online? How can government best encourage the development of new education and training products and/or delivery methods to attract students to Victorian digital education offerings at scale?

As a peak body IHEA does not collect data on individual institutions use of edtech. Individual institution advice on this question will provide informed response.

## Contact

*For further information please contact:*

Ms Anurag Kanwar  
Policy Manager  
Independent Higher Education Australia  
Email: [anurag.kanwar@ihea.edu.au](mailto:anurag.kanwar@ihea.edu.au)  
Phone: 0499 213 158

<sup>16</sup> <https://liveinmelbourne.vic.gov.au/migrate/skilled-migration-visas/491>