



INDEPENDENT
HIGHER EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

IHEA SUBMISSION

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES INQUIRY INTO BUILDING ASIA CAPABILITY IN AUSTRALIA THROUGH THE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND BEYOND

5 November 2025

IHEA Submission

House of Representatives Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia Through the Education System and Beyond

Independent Higher Education Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the House of Representatives Inquiry into Building Asia Capability in Australia Through the Education System and Beyond, for which submissions are due 7 November 2025.

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education is undertaking an inquiry into the development of Asia capability within our nation, including the teaching and learning of Asian languages, cultural literacy, and regional engagement within and beyond the formal education system.

The inquiry will consider how Australia can build Asia capability across the life course, from early learning through to tertiary education and into the workforce. It will seek to identify system-level reforms and structural enablers that may support development of Australia's Asia capability.

The inquiry will include consideration of:

- Structural enablers and barriers to developing Asia capability, including national and state and territory responsibilities under the Constitution, societal attitudes, institutional arrangements, workforce supply and demand issues and availability of national data.
- Good practice models for building Asia capability, including through language learning, intercultural understanding, and regional engagement – including immersive experiences and utilising digital technologies.
- The current state of Asian language learning and Asian cultural studies in schools, universities and the community, and strategies to stimulate demand and improve access.
- Opportunities to develop and promote the value of Asian cultural literacy, intercultural understanding and Asian diplomacy skills outside of language learning – across schools, universities, communities, the workforce, industry and government.
- Expectations for whole-of-government coordination and collaboration, including roles and responsibilities of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Education, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Austrade, Jobs and Skills Australia and state and territory governments.
- Other matters the committee considers relevant.

IHEA feedback

From an Australian perspective, international education is both a critical services export and a vital enabler of capability, people-to-people connections and long-term partnerships with Asia.

International education is a critical global connection and there are a number of reasons why students travel from Asia to study in Australia. These include life experiences; a quality education and qualification; competitive cost of living and cost to study; and the reputation of tertiary education providers.

In addition to enriching the lives of students who chose to study in Australia, international education delivers significant economic benefits to Australia. In 2024, as our fourth largest export, and largest services and non-resources, export, international education contributed \$51.5 billion to the Australian economy.

It is also estimated to support approximately 250,000 Australian Jobs, noting that international students also undertake part-time work, as most higher education students do, in jobs that Australians depend upon, such as aged care, early childhood education and care, hospitality, tourism and retail.

Australia's international education story is intertwined with Asia. Consistently, the top five countries of origin of international students who chose to study in Australia are from Asia. In order they are China, India, Nepal Vietnam and Philippines and collectively they represented 57 per cent of international students studying at Australian education providers in the year to date to July 2025.

In considering the indicative New Overseas Student Commencement (NOSC) levels for international students at each higher education provider, the Australian Government announced that one of the two criteria that it will apply to publicly funded universities to increase their NOSC in 2026 is increased engagement with Southeast Asia.

This consultation paper along with the criteria for public universities to increase their NOSC reflect the importance of Asia to Australia, particularly in relation to education. The original intent of the NOSC was to be legislated in Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024. This was unsuccessful, and instead a provider's NOSC is used to influence student visa processing in the following way: Priority 1, or high processing up to 80 per cent of the NOSC; and Priority 2, or standard, visa processing once 80 per cent of the NOSC has been reached.

In addition to the immediate and direct economic benefits that result from Asian students studying at Australia education providers come a range of other benefits: including increased entrepreneurship; knowledge exchange and international collaboration; economic benefits derived from trade and investment links and soft diplomacy; social benefits flowing from improved cultural literacy; and stronger cultural linkages in both Australia and within Asia.

Consistent with the Government's approaches to build connections with Asia, should be the removal of barriers for international students, including from Asia, to study in Australia. The connections that are built from Asian students studying in Australia are the foundation of building lasting relationships, which Australia can strengthen by not having any form of caps in place, including "soft" caps that are tied to visa processing. Building these connections by being a welcoming destination for international students from Asia will provide a platform to "build Asia capability across the life course, from early learning through to tertiary education and into the workforce", which is a central objective of this inquiry.

Who We Are

Independent Higher Education Australia Ltd. (IHEA) is a peak body established in 2001 to represent Australian independent (private sector) higher education institutions. Our membership spans independent universities, university colleges and other institutes of higher education, all of which are registered higher education providers accredited by the national higher education regulator, TEQSA or associate members seeking registration.

There is a long tradition of independent higher education providers in Australia, with the first provider created as early as 1815, only 27 years after the first British settlement in Sydney in 1788. In total, five providers were established between 1815 and 1845 and preceding the first public university. The fifth of these was St James College, which was created in 1845. The founders of St James College were then involved in creating Moore College in 1856, and remarkably Moore College, a University College, still exists and is Australia's longest continuously operating independent higher education provider.

Our Vision is that students, domestic and international, have open and equitable access to world class independent higher education in Australia, built on the foundations of equity, choice, and diversity.

Our Mission is to represent independent higher education and promote recognition and respect of independent providers as they contribute to Australian education, the Australian economy, and to society in general. We achieve this by promoting continuous improvement of academic and quality standards within member institutions, by advocating equity for their staff and students, and by delivering services that further strengthen independent providers' reputations as innovative, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of industry and other relevant stakeholders in both higher education and vocational education and training. IHEA's commitment is to excellence, productivity and growth in independent higher education being delivered through a trusted Australian education system underpinned by equity, choice, and diversity.

IHEA members have different missions, scales, and course offerings across the full AQF range (Diplomas to Doctorates). IHEA has 87 higher education providers that are members, which rises to 124 if those providers' constituent colleges and subsidiaries are included.

IHEA's 87 higher education providers comprise:

- Five private Universities (Australian University of Theology, Avondale University, Bond University, Torrens University and University of Divinity).
- Six University Colleges (ACAP University College, Australian University College of Divinity, Alphacrucis University College, Excelsia University College, Moore Theological College and SAE University College).
- A further eight (Griffith College, International College of Management Sydney, Kaplan Business School, Marcus Oldham College, Morling College, Photography Studies College, The College of Law and Western Sydney University International College) self-accrediting institutes of higher education (nineteen in total including the Universities and University Colleges described above).
- Seventy-one not-for-profit and for-profit institutions of higher education (which includes three self-accrediting institutes); and related corporate entities.

IHEA members teach approximately 74 percent of the students in the independent sector (i.e., more than 130,000 students) and educate students in a range of disciplines, including law, agricultural science, architecture, business, accounting, tourism and hospitality, education, health sciences, theology, creative arts, information technology, human services and social sciences.

IHEA holds a unique position in higher education as a representative peak body of higher education providers. Membership in IHEA is only open to providers registered, or seeking registration, with the Australian regulator – TEQSA. However, some IHEA members are dual and multi-sector providers who also deliver VET and/or English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) courses.

Contacts:

The Hon. Dr. Peter Hendy
Chief Executive Officer
Email: Peter.Hendy@ihea.edu.au
Phone: 0418 679 911

Dr James Hart
Chief of Policy
Email: James.Hart@ihea.edu.au
Phone: 0418 694 680