

Australia's International Education and Skills Strategic Framework

Murdoch University Response

International engagement is a core activity in Murdoch University's strategic plan, Ngala Kwop Bidji, through which we seek to build mutually beneficial partnerships internationally to ensure the maximum benefit from that engagement for our domestic students and our research.

The University has campuses in Singapore and Dubai and attracts students from around the globe to our Australian campuses. Importantly and in line with Government direction outlined in the Australian Universities Accord, Murdoch sees our international engagement as "less as an industry and more as a crucial a crucial element of Australia's soft diplomacy, regional prosperity and development"¹.

The University is a member of the Innovative Research Universities network and Universities Australia and is supportive of their submissions. The University would also like to highlight areas of specific interest for Murdoch's international student recruitment, with a focus on social and economic factors specific to Western Australia and the Peel Region.

Quality and Integrity

Table A providers are required, through registration conditions with TEQSA and under the ESOS Act, to provide support for students through a mix of learning and pastoral care services. The learning support is informed by a robust tiered learning support framework that seeks to offer students a range of support options. International students are supported through the offering of specific gateway communications skills units in key programs, designed to actively improve learning outcomes. Additional services such as Grammarly, Studiosity and Peer Academic Coaches are available to all students, with targeted programs to identify students in need of additional support. Where appropriate, students are provided targeted workshops or one-to-one consultations with learning advisors.

As unlimited self-accrediting authorities, universities are recognised as having the ability to design and deliver high quality courses across all broad fields of education. This includes authority to accredit courses to be added to institutional CRICOS registration.

These support mechanisms are underpinned by institutional quality assurance (QA) processes that both assure and monitor the quality and effectiveness of academic programs and student support systems.

The **implications of Ministerial discretion over CRICOS registration restrictions at the course level need to be clarified in terms of self-accreditation and institutional autonomy**. While the Minister has indicated that course level restriction is a "reserve power"², it remains an option. **Murdoch recommends that course level CROCOS restrictions be removed for self-accrediting institutions.**

The Framework will lead to significant additional regulatory and compliance costs as a result of new reporting to the Department of Education or proposed Tertiary Education Commission. The proportionate cost of regulation per student in smaller institutions is significantly higher than in larger providers both in terms of actual financial costs and internal resources.

To mitigate the differential impact, **Murdoch recommends that QA and reporting required to manage student caps be consolidated in one agency and that reporting requirements be restricted to a core dataset to be negotiated with the sector**. Further, Murdoch recommends that TEQSA/Department of Education support institutions in 2024 to assist them to be compliant for implementation in 2025.

Managed Growth

Geographic diversification

Peri-urban universities like Murdoch are critical to meeting the workforce development and innovation needs of their regions. Strengthening regional economies needs to include attracting international students, with regional authorities keen to build social diversity; provide in-study,

¹ [Australian Universities Accord Interim Report](#) (Page 18)

² [Education Minister Jason Clare won't use full powers on student caps | The Australian](#)

WIL, and post-study work opportunities; and encourage appropriate migration pathways in areas of workforce shortfalls.

The City of Mandurah is seeking to strengthen its economy through the Transform Mandurah³ initiative. This includes components of international recruitment, as well as campaigns to attract international students to the region, particularly focused around nursing and allied health. This reflects the difficulty in attracting staff to jobs in health in the region and the desire by regional authorities to explore migration as mechanism to meet workforce shortfalls.

The WA Department of Training and Workforce Development has actively pursued a strategy to attract skilled migrants post-Covid focused on skills in demand in the WA economy⁴. This has included identifying key deficits in labour force supply and demand and providing incentives for skilled migration pathways. In areas of key skills needs, retention of international students for post-study work, leading to migration, is an important component of workforce development.

Murdoch University supports the critical involvement of State Governments, through their workforce development strategies, as a key input to allocating international student enrolments and thus managing graduate migration.

Global skills demand

There is an inherent dichotomy between the prioritisation of skills needed in the Australian economy and those needed by other nations. The skills needs of Low and Middle Income Countries reflect differences in economic activity as well as the current capacity of the working population.

Around 80% of international students return home either immediately on graduation or after a short period of post-study work and will spend their most of their working lives in non-Australian labour markets. Their course choices will therefore reflect their own interests and career plans, aligned to their expectations of the labour market in their home country.

A clear example of the critical needs of developing nations is provided in the example of Namgyal Dorji, the Bhutanese Minister for Industry, Commerce, and Employment (Page 24 of the Consultation Draft) whose study in International Relations has driven positive outcomes for Bhutan. Murdoch has a number of government supported Bhutanese students in international development programs that demonstrate high demand from international students but are not priority areas locally and have limited demand from domestic students.

As a result, **Murdoch does not support the prioritisation of or alignment with Australia's skills needs in the allocation of international student places and encourages flexibility in course allocations to ensure strong programs with key international demand are retained.**

Post study work rights

Safe employment while studying, where students are not exploited, is a key element of social connection. It facilitates cultural awareness, provides income that helps cover educational fees, and encourages broader social interaction. These factors strengthen social and academic networks that encourage connection to Australia when students return home as well as opening opportunities for students seeking post-study work.

Post study work rights provide a key mechanism to consolidate student learning, provide practical work experience, and again strengthen social interactions.

Recent changes to the Temporary Graduate visa (subclass 485) program reduce the maximum eligible age for Post-Higher Education Work stream applicants to 35 years of age or under at the time of application. This major change to the status of students who had begun their studies with the expectation of post study work is indicative of the need for clear regulation of work rights for international students and acknowledgement of the specific circumstances of applicants related to their career aspirations on their return home. Again, Murdoch's cohort of Bhutanese students studying international development are an example of the potential impact of this change on people well in their career looking to progress through international education. Post study work helps meet the cost of their education as well as strengthening ties to the local community.

Student Accommodation

Murdoch University has approximately 850 beds available on campus for domestic and international students. There has been a small waiting list over a number of years, both pre- and post-Covid that is less than four percent of our current student cohort. In addition, students have, over a

³ [Transform Mandurah | City of Mandurah](#)

⁴ [New settings to make WA the most attractive State for skilled migrants | Western Australian Government \(www.wa.gov.au\)](#)

considerable period, demonstrated a preference for off campus accommodation and have generally had success in finding housing in the open market. Landlords are providing accommodation options that cater to domestic and international students in local markets.

Murdoch is of the view that additional purpose-built accommodation as a prerequisite for future international student growth should not be required. Initiatives such as the previous National Rental Affordability Scheme provide a useful example of how the Government encouraged rapid development of more accommodation capacity broadly, that benefited international education by opening capacity across all rental accommodation options.

A local example is the development of a social and affordable housing project⁵ in the Murdoch Health and Knowledge Precinct that will provide up to 216 dwellings for local health care workers and TAFE and university students. These housing units will ease demand for accommodation in local markets more effectively than purpose-built student housing.

Transnational education

Murdoch University has a long-standing record of excellence in transnational education (TNE), with teaching and research campuses in Singapore and Dubai, together with a newly opened campus in Malaysia, catering to international students across the region.

Murdoch also undertakes a range of TNE activities that incorporate onshore enrolment during a student's course. This can range from those enrolled in a TNE program who may want to come onshore for a single semester through to a formal 2+2 program. It is important that the full scope of TNE activities is considered in setting enrolment caps both nationally and at an institutional level.

TNE growth faces both country specific regulatory barriers and the initial costs of expansion into these markets, even if those costs are shared with an educational partner. Institutions that have taken the considerable risk of expanding into TNE markets have done so at their own cost, generally utilising income from onshore international students, and this effort should be recognised.

Murdoch recommends that the Commonwealth seek to incentivise the expansion of TNE by providing a direct link between onshore caps and the extent to which a University participates in offshore delivery.

Murdoch has active study abroad and student exchange programs⁶ that facilitate international students spending one or two semesters at Murdoch with their academic credit transferred back to their home university degree. **Murdoch recommends that study abroad and student exchange programs be exempted from an institution's international student cap.**

⁵ [\\$100m social and affordable housing project proposed for Murdoch workforce | The West Australian](#)

⁶ [Study Abroad and Exchange | Murdoch University](#)