

Richard Heller and Stephen Leeder

Objective 1

1. Are there further reforms governments should consider that will improve the quality and integrity of the sector?

We welcome many innovative aspects of the draft Framework, and are encouraged by its frequent reference for future education to be conducted with integrity. While at the micro level, greater integrity should feature in the recruitment of students and all the processes associated with their Australian education, at the macro level educational offerings should surely take a greater interest in addressing the current concerns expressed by many international policy scholars and ethicists with the widening gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' in and among members of the international community. We note and support especially the last three actions proposed in the Framework:

- Expanding offshore, online, other innovative arrangements to diversify the sector.
- Contributing to global skills needs.
- Advancing Australia's strategic interests

To these we would add our hope that the ethical integrity of our educational offerings would include a deep and thoughtful concern to see global inequity reduced.

We focus our response on Objective 3: Taking Australian education and training to the world.

2. What more can providers do to improve the integrity of the international education sector?

In summary, we propose that Australia's strategic interests and those of our international neighbours would be served by taking into account the populations that future students would be drawn from when establishing pathways to academic education and skills development. Ideally, Australia could lead a new and more enlightened approach to international access to higher education, by establishing an Australian-led network for global online learning.

Objective 2

1. What factors should inform government's approach to allocating international student enrolments across sectors, providers, and locations in Australia?

2. What considerations for government should inform the overall level of international students in Australia?

3. How will this approach to managing the system affect individual providers?

4. Should sectors other than higher education and vocational education and training, such as schools, ELICOS and non-award be included in approaches to manage the system for sustainable growth?

5. How should government determine which courses are best aligned to Australia's skills needs?

6. How should government implement a link between the number of international students and an increased supply of student housing?

7. What transition arrangements would support the implementation of a new approach?

Objective 3

1. What are the barriers to growth in offshore and transnational delivery of Australian education and training?

What are the barriers to growth in offshore and transnational delivery of Australian education and training?

- A focus on income from international students onshore rather than equity integrity that takes account of global needs for higher education.
- Failure to collaborate rather than compete.
- Failure to grasp the opportunities of online education and modern education technology.

Failure to base our education of international students on an appraisal of the needs of the national populations from which we draw them.

The current provision of international education by Australian universities does not consider equity in any great depth, recruiting students largely from wealthy nations with arguably the least need.

We have shown¹ that, for example, using 2022 data for higher education enrolment of international students in Australian universities, in South-East Asia three countries stand out as having very high access rates. These are Singapore (403 students in Australia per 100,000 population), Brunei Darussalam (115 per 100,000) and Malaysia (63 per 100,000). At the same time, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, the Philippines, and Indonesia have rates less than 5 per 100,000 population.

Malaysia and Singapore together provided 47% of South-East Asian international student numbers in Australia in 2022 but comprised only 6% of the total population of South-East Asia. Indonesia provided 12% of South-East Asian international student numbers in Australia but comprised 40% of South-East Asia's combined population.

Looking more broadly, in 2022, per 100,000 population, median rates of students coming to Australian universities were: Indian subcontinent 42, Pacific 28.9, China 10.5, South-East Asia 5.8, Sub-Saharan Africa 0.5: there was wide variation between countries within these regions.

It is difficult to see how these figures accord with Australia's short-term strategic interests, let alone go far in honouring integrity (especially equity).

Longer-term, global populations will change. By 2100 Nigeria is projected to have a larger population than China². The populations of many African countries will have doubled by 2050³. Our planning for the future of international education should surely take the massive future growth among the youth of Africa into account.

2. Where can government direct effort to support transnational education?

Where can government direct effort to support transnational education?

- Provide encouragement, and seed funding if required, for a full international needs assessment for global higher education to which Australian universities might contribute.
- Provide encouragement, and seed funding if required, for a business case and the development and maintenance of a collaborative network for global online learning.

A network of global online learning

We support the Framework's mention of online learning with its potential to correct the needs unmet by onshore education in Australia. We propose an additional delivery model to those quoted in the Framework (Branch campus, Franchise arrangement, Twinning arrangement, Online) viz: Online global network.

An online global network would have several advantages. First, it would offer education to individual students who would otherwise miss out from education in their local setting or through attendance at Australian universities in person.

Second, it could help redress the current inequities in global access to Australia's higher education.

Third, Australian universities have adopted a largely competitive business model¹ (with some exceptions mainly in research) with regard to international connections. The pedagogic locus of control remains firmly lodged in individual Australian universities. The manifest advantages of collaboration include building capacity among international universities for broad-spectrum academic activity including research. Hence the network should include global universities. This would also avoid the accusation of colonisation of knowledge to which Government and universities should be aware.

What would a network for online global learning² look like?

- Australian universities would collaborate with each other as the key drivers of the network.
- A needs assessment would be undertaken of regions and countries where access to Australia's higher education might be targeted.
- Ideally other universities in the Global North and South and other 'industry' partners including Non Governmental Organisations, and relevant governments and ministries would join the network.
- Degrees would be offered by each University or created by a combination of courses from different network partners.
- Students, as individuals or groups from industry partners, would enrol in award streams through a university of their choice even if the programme is made up from courses from a number of providers.
- It would start with just one or two subject areas of relevance to those in the Global South, as proof of concept, and if successful build to scale.
- It would develop an infrastructure to include IT support and an appropriate quality assurance process.

Note: these suggestions chime with recommendations in the Universities Accord to 'support diversification of international student markets... including through using innovative transnational education delivery modes'.

In our submission to the Universities Accord on international education³ we provided examples of global educational innovations and potential partnership models, and discussed the importance of offering additional online education at cost rather than at a profit to cross-subsidise other parts of Australia's higher education system.

