

StudyNT

Objective 1

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

N/A

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

The Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act and the National Code sets standards to ensure education services meet the needs and expectations of international students who come to Australia. Education providers are already required to meet a number of expectations set out by legislation. As defined in the draft Framework, 'the actions of a small number of unscrupulous providers undermine Australia's reputation and exploited students'. We suggest that Government regulatory bodies who already have the power to grant and audit education and training providers should be using their existing powers (and proposed additional powers) to remove the 'small number' of poor providers, the majority of providers should not be required to do more. We submit that the Australia Government should be actively regulating the sector.

Objective 2

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

We request the Australian Government takes a nuanced approach that considers regional circumstances. The Northern Territory (NT) presents particular challenges, including low population growth, higher operational costs for businesses (including education and training providers), and the need to align educational outcomes with local economic needs.

The NT's unique demographic, geographic, and economic characteristics mean that the international student industry holds an elevated impact to the Territory economy than it does nationally. Unlike major cities, the NT has a lower concentration of student population due to its regional and remote location.

As at March 2024, 4,421 international students were enrolled in the Territory, specifically 3,013 (14.5% year-on-year growth) for higher education, 1,157 (-3.3% year-on-year growth) for vocational education and training and 87 (0.04% year-on-year growth) for schools.

Over the past five years, overall population growth has averaged 0.15% across the NT. Between 2003 and 2013 the NT population grew by 40,000 and between 2012 and 2023 it grew by 10,000. The Territory's estimated resident population decreased by 60 persons to 252,469 in the September quarter 2023.

Both New South Wales and Victoria's international student population is comparable to the entire NT population, with NSW having 277,363 more students, and Victoria having 219,234 more international student enrolments.

This scale means that small restrictions to the number of international student visas granted, has a greater proportion of impact to the NT.

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

A concentration of students in three capital cities in Australia doesn't mean that the Australian Government should consider all capital cities the same way. When approaching 'caps' or allocation of enrolments, the Australian Government needs to consider the value to the Australian economy overall, and rather than capping all education and training providers should consider driving students to regional destinations/locations.

The NT's context requires specific measures to support the growth and sustainability of international education. By recognising the significant economic impact of international students, providing targeted support for regional delivery, and consulting on VET enrolments, the government can ensure that the NT continues to benefit from a vibrant and dynamic international education sector.

There cannot be a blanket approach across Australia. It is inequitable.

We understand that there has been consultation with universities, but the Australian Government needs to consider further the contribution of private higher education institutions and vocational education and training providers.

The sector has gone a long way to rebuild Australia's reputation as a welcoming destination to international students since COVID, these changes and recent political statements are doing far more damage to our reputation than COVID did. Australia is presenting internationally as a destination that no longer welcomes international students and migrants. Given we are already behind the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada as a study destination of choice, Australia needs to present as a more welcoming and multicultural destination.

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

If done with proper consultation, beyond the university sector, and there is a staged approach to implementation, we would anticipate that majority of providers will support greater regulation in favour of reducing exploitation and supporting international students.

However, unhelpful public discussions around reducing the number of migrants and students are doing substantial damage to 'brand Australia' and will require significant resources from providers to continue to recruit and portray Australia as a welcoming destination.

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?

No, we do not support the inclusion of schools and ELICOS. These are significantly smaller sectors that are not driving enrolment growth in Australia. We also believe that post-graduate research degrees, which add significantly value to Australia should n

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

The Australian Government needs to align with various State/Territory Government skills occupation lists, including the NT Skilled Occupation Priority List.

There should also be greater consideration of economic drivers for regions, and aligning workforce to support growth in these sectors, including any major projects.

Engagement with industry, state and territory governments, and education and training providers is crucial. Industry partners can provide insights into in-demand skills, while governments can support regional initiatives. Education and training providers can adapt course offerings based on these insights, preparing graduates for immediate employment and long-term career success. This collaborative

approach ensures that the education system remains dynamic and responsive to Australia's evolving economic needs, optimising the contributions of international students.

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

The Student Accommodation Council's recent report: myth busting international students' role in the rental crisis, released in April 2024 suggests that international students only make up 4% of Australia's rental market and are not to blame for the current housing crisis in Australia.

The housing market is very complex, and a multitude of factors play into affordability, including land releases, tax policy, government incentives, banking regulation, overseas investor rules, immigration, employment, wages growth and inflation.

Ultimately, many experts agree, its basic economics: there has been much more demand than supply for a long time.

It's safe to assume that the supply problem has been caused by lack of land supply, poor planning and approvals processes, lack of enabling infrastructure and skills shortages. While it's true that migration has been elevated, this should only be seen as a catch up after the COVID period of negative net migration. In 2023, housing affordability worsened and has increased by over 35% since the start of the decade.

Rather than blaming migrants/international students, who contribute substantially to the Australian economy and workforce, the Australian Government should be exploring ways to support state and territory governments to ease land-use planning rules to enable more housing. Effective housing planning could include adequate investment in social housing, reduced homelessness, better zoning and planning systems, more capacity in the construction sector and a taxation system that supports supply and affordability.

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

To support the implementation of a new approach, transition arrangements should allow adequate time for thorough consultation with stakeholders. This involves engaging with educational institutions, industry partners, state and territory governments, and student representatives to ensure the new policies address all relevant concerns. A phased implementation plan, combined with clear communication and support, will help institutions and stakeholders gradually adjust to the changes, minimising disruption and facilitating a smoother transition.

Additionally, recognising the long-term nature of degree programs and the necessity for long-term planning is crucial. Policies should account for the extended timelines required for students to complete their studies and integrate into the workforce. This means setting realistic, long-term goals and providing continuous support and resources throughout the transition. Regular monitoring and evaluation will allow adjustments to be made as needed, ensuring the approach remains effective and sustainable over time.

The government can facilitate a successful transition supporting the education sector and the broader economy by prioritising long-term planning and thorough stakeholder engagement.

Objective 3

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

N/A

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

Not an answer to above, but some final comments:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.

The NT and regional Australia offers a lot for international students, including genuine employment opportunities in their field of study, and a strong, vibrant multicultural community. Greater can be done to support regional Australia, and not just in the university sector.

The Australian Government should not consider all capital cities the same. There needs to be consideration for those cities/regions with less population growth and smaller economies, and what the impact these reforms will have on those regions.

Caps should only be implemented after thorough consultation with international education and training providers – not just universities.

There needs to be greater consideration of the entire sector (schools, vocational education, English language and private higher education providers). These are generally much smaller institutions.

We agree that integrity is important, and support enhanced experienced and ethical providers, a diverse sector and enhanced monitoring.

We support a new policy that acknowledges that graduate outcomes and are important in seeking to attract and retain international students as skilled migrants.

The Framework talks about the reputation as a destination of choice, but recent political statements and Australian Government policies have done significant damage to that reputation. This has created a destination that no longer welcomes international students and migrants and is publically promoting that.

Rather than supporting the general population's opinion that migrants and international students are to blame for housing and other social issues, the Australian Government can do more to educate Australia on the value of international students, economically, as well as socially and culturally.