

SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT GROWTH INQUIRY INTO SUPPORTING AUSTRALIA'S EXPORTS AND ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

23 September 2019

Universities Australia is the peak body representing the Australian university sector. Universities Australia advocates for policy settings conducive to the maintenance of a strong and dynamic international education sector, that reflect the important foundation international education and research partnerships provides to our foreign export efforts.

Universities Australia strongly maintains that the most important action the Australian Government can take in supporting our international education sector is to ensure Australia's ability to continue offering a superior 'product' that provides value for money and a positive student experience. This requires not only a strong focus by the sector, but also higher education and research policy stability and adequate public investment.

In our submission to the Australian Government's Foreign Policy White Paper¹ Universities Australia recommended that:

- The Australian Government ensures policy consistency and an adequate level of public investment in universities to maintain and enhance Australia as a destination of choice for international students;
- The Australian Government broadens its focus beyond international education as a service delivery export industry to international opportunities for research and industry collaboration;
- The Australian Government continues to advocate, through formal bilateral negotiations, for the easing of impediments to transnational education;
- The Australian Government supports Australia's global research ambitions through funding to guarantee a seat at the table on large scale, long term international research projects and partnerships;
- The Australian Trade and Investment Commission increases resourcing for the promotion of Australian international education and develops a consistent, whole-of-government brand for Australian education; and
- Consistent and appropriate visa policy settings to maintain Australia in offering a comparative advantage for students and academic staff wishing to study or work overseas.

¹ <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/submission/submission-to-the-foreign-policy-white-paper/>

A crucial component of Australia's innovation capability is the research conducted in our universities. A dynamic research sector, well-supported by strong research commercialisation pathways, feeds the nation's innovation capacity and drives growth in exports. Ensuring Australia's world-class university research is adequately resourced, and that avenues for university-industry collaboration are supported by the Government, is important to Australia's ability to keep pace with the rest of the world. This is necessary both with respect to producing quality research, and being able to readily translate that research into products and services to the benefit of both Australian and global society. Funding for both applied and pure research is essential to feed the research translation pipeline.

Universities Australia continues to advocate that the Australian Government play a more active role in supporting Australia's research capabilities and research excellence through specific funding for large-scale, long-term international collaboration that capitalises on Australia's research strength and existing infrastructure. Where such funding has been made available, Australia has engaged in strong and productive collaborative endeavours in areas such as astronomy, molecular biology and marine science. Without this support, Australian universities wouldn't have had the required resources and capacity. Modest Government funding can often attract co-investment from other partners and lead to significant research breakthroughs.

Australia's international education sector attracts hundreds of thousands of international students to Australia. As of June 2019, there were more than 630 000 international students in Australia, with just over half of these studying in the university sector². Data published by the Department of Education indicates that the international education sector contributed \$35.2 billion to the Australian economy in 2018, making it Australia's fourth largest export³. In addition to the direct economic benefits, the sector supports more than 240 000 jobs around Australia.

Investment in the Australian higher education sector need not be limited to onshore education provision. A number of our member institutions educate significant numbers of international students offshore. Australian universities have campuses in countries around the globe, including Malaysia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, India, Italy and Vietnam. In 2016, around 29 per cent of international students studying within Australian higher education courses were located offshore.

Support for Australian universities to progress offshore ventures, be they the establishment of a stand-alone campus, or a partnership with an overseas university, would help consolidate the Australian international education sector. Offshore campuses create options for students to study in their home country and provide a bolster against potential future changes in the flow of students coming to study onshore in Australia. This support is well-demonstrated through recent agreements negotiated by the Australian government, such as the Indonesia Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and the Australia–Hong Kong Free Trade Agreement. Further support from the Government could take the form of seed funding to progress collaboration and partnerships with foreign universities, or to scope the establishment of future offshore campuses.

Universities Australia also reiterates its recommendations in the 2017 submission to the Foreign Policy White Paper that the Australian Government broadens its focus beyond international education as a service delivery export to encompass international opportunities for research and industry collaboration. International partners and colleagues are strongly welcomed and recent changes to visa arrangements for post study work arrangements for higher degree international students have supported this approach. The Australian Government should recognise and support Australia's global research ambitions through funding to guarantee a seat at the table on large-scale, long-term international research projects and partnerships, such as Horizon Europe. Australia also hosts world class research centres and research infrastructure facilities that operate within safe regulatory frameworks and attract several international partners.

² <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/MONTHLY%20SUMMARIES/2019/Jun%202019%20MonthlyInfographic.pdf>

³ <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/Research-Snapshots/Documents/Education%20infographic%20Australia%202018.pdf>