



Australian Government

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT REPORT:

International education support and collaboration

*Review of the 2010–2011 annual report of the Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations*

MARCH 2016

The Australian Government thanks the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment for their report, *International education support and collaboration - Review of the 2010–2011 Annual Report of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations*.

The report identified the Study in Australia website (www.studyinaustralia.gov.au) as an effective source of information for prospective students and recommended three enhancements to provide additional information on transport concessions, accommodation and health insurance. The committee also highlighted the need for further regular discussions on international education and for a coordinated national approach to international education in Australia.

The Government supports all four recommendations in the report.

International education is a vital part of our national economic and social prosperity. It is now Australia's third largest export and largest services sector, supporting over 130,000 jobs around Australia. The latest figures indicate strong growth in the international education sector. In 2015, Australia welcomed a record half a million international students. Preliminary ABS data also shows export income from education services for 2015 will be around \$20 billion.

To secure Australia's place as a world leader in international education and ensure sustainable growth, in April 2015, the Government released the *Draft National Strategy for International Education* for consultation with all parts of the Australian community. Over 120 organisations, individuals and peak bodies provided written feedback on the Draft Strategy.

To ensure a coordinated approach to international education issues and help finalise the strategy, the Government established a Coordinating Council for International Education in June 2015. The Council included ministers with portfolio responsibility for international education and six prominent education and industry experts:

- The Minister for Education and Training (Chair)
- The Minister for Foreign Affairs
- The Minister for Trade and Investment
- The Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science
- The Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
- The Assistant Minister for Education and Training
- Ms Sue Blundell, Executive Director, English Australia
- Ms Kate Carnell AO, CEO, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Hon Phil Honeywood, CEO, International Education Association of Australia
- Ms Belinda Robinson, Chief Executive, Universities Australia
- Mr Bill Spurr AO, Chair, Education Adelaide
- Mr Malcolm White, Acting CEO, TAFE Directors Australia.

The Council convened two roundtables on international education as part of the consultations on the Draft Strategy. The roundtables, held at Parliament House in Canberra on 18 June and 13 August 2015, brought together over 200 representatives from education and training institutions, businesses, peak bodies, community groups and all levels of government to collaborate on a blueprint for the future of international education.

The outcomes of both roundtables, together with the written feedback to the Draft Strategy, ensure the final national strategy represents a shared national vision that will position Australia as a global leader in education, training and research. The Government will release the final *National Strategy for International Education* in the first half of 2016.

The National Strategy is part of a range of Australian Government initiatives that will strengthen Australia's international education sector. The Australian Government will soon launch a ten year market development plan – *Australian International Education 2025* to attract more students to study in Australia and expand Australia's education and training services offshore. The *Australia Global Alumni Engagement Strategy* will also help to grow a global alumni community that actively engages and promotes Australia and advances our national interests.

The Government intends to introduce a simplified international student visa framework (SSVF) from July 2016 to further boost Australia's international education sector. Under the SSVF, there will be a reduction in the number of student visa subclasses from eight to two, and the introduction of a simplified single immigration risk framework for all international students.

The Government is deepening Australia's relationships in the Indo-Pacific by supporting more Australian undergraduate students to study in the region. The Australian Government committed \$100 million for the first five years of the New Colombo Plan. A pilot phase held in 2014 supported 1300 mobility students and 40 scholarship holders to study in four locations. In the 2015 round, the programme expanded to 38 possible host locations and supported over 3000 mobility grants and almost 70 scholarships. The 2016 round will see over 5000 mobility programme students and 100 scholarship holders studying across the Indo-Pacific region. Funding for the programme is now ongoing.

The Government has signed Free Trade Agreements with China, Japan and Korea and concluded negotiations on the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement. These Agreements provides a strong platform to expand Australian education and training exports to key partner countries in Asia and Latin America.

The Government actively participates in bilateral joint working group meetings with countries in the Asia-Pacific region including China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia to build deeper bilateral and multilateral relationships in education. Our participation in multilateral forums such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the East Asia Summit, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development are valuable to developing comparable and complementary process in areas such as quality assurance, student mobility, qualifications recognition and research collaborations.

Detailed response to recommendations

The Australian Government has considered the four recommendations made in the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee and supports all recommendations. The Government is committed to ensuring all students have the highest quality educational and living experience in Australia. The Government consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including students, on the Draft National Strategy for International Education, which includes actions to improve access to public transport, accommodation and health services for international students.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that information on the eligibility of international students for transport concessions in the respective states and territories be made available to prospective students on the Study in Australia website.

Government response: Supported

The Study in Australia website provides information about transport concessions in each state and territory, along with links to the relevant websites. For example, the link to transport information for Victoria directs students to the Study Melbourne website which provides detailed transport information in 10 languages on:

- Melbourne's different public transport options – train, trams and buses, including a journey planner
- details of public transport in regional Victoria
- details of public transport to and from the airport
- travel discounts for international students
- other transport options, including:
 - taxis
 - private vehicles – including information on registration and insurance
 - driver's licenses
 - cycling.

The Study Melbourne website also provides students with a link to Public Transport Victoria where students are able to plan their travel to and from specific university and TAFE campuses and schools.

The level of information provided by the links on Study in Australia to other websites is comprehensive, specific to that location and up-to-date. Austrade works collaboratively with the states and territories through the Digital Content Working Group to ensure the links direct students to the correct resource and that the most relevant information is referred to on Study in Australia. Additionally, information on the average transport costs is provided under the Living Costs in Australia page of the Study in Australia website.

Since the release of the committee's report in May 2013, the New South Wales and Victorian state governments have begun offering discounted fares to eligible international students. Details of these concessions have been incorporated into the Study in Australia website.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the sections on accommodation and tenancy on the Study in Australia website be enhanced with case-studies and Frequently Asked Questions about tenancy rights.

Government response: Supported

The Study in Australia website provides detailed information on accommodation options under the Live in Australia menu. The accommodation page features information on various types of accommodation available to international students including:

- homestay
- on-campus accommodation
- rental or lease accommodation
- short-term accommodation
- legal issues and protection related to accommodation in Australia.

There is also accommodation information available on other Study in Australia web pages, including:

- Live in Australia
- Living costs in Australia
- Plan your departure
- Arriving in Australia
- Support services for students.

The redeveloped Study in Australia website currently features over 100 individual student stories documenting the unique international student experience in Australia. These stories can now be searched by keyword or filters using pre-set terms, such as 'accommodation'.

Austrade is working with states and territories and education institutions to increase the number of student stories and case studies available on the Study in Australia website. This will include increased case studies detailing individual students' accommodation experiences and options.

The new Study in Australia website also acknowledges the legal support available to students through state and territory websites and relevant consumer affairs departments.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the sections on health insurance cover on the Study in Australia website be enhanced with case-study examples and Frequently Asked Questions that address common misunderstandings about health cover requirements for international students. The website should include example quotes of health insurance costs for international students. This will assist students when they compare the different deals offered by health insurance providers.

Government response: Supported

The Study in Australia website informs students of the need to maintain Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) throughout the entire duration of their study in Australia as a requirement of their student visa. The Study in Australia website also refers students to the Department of Health and the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman for more comprehensive details about their health insurance options.

The Commonwealth Department of Health's website for international students provides information on providers and average costs of OSHC, as well as answers to frequently asked questions such as:

- what is not covered by OSHC?
- how much does OSHC cost?
- what if a student needs treatment?
- how do students pay for treatment?
- how long do students have to have coverage?
- how do students renew their OSHC?
- can students transfer to a different OSHC provider?
- can students take out insurance with an overseas insurer?
- what if students have a problem with their overseas insurer or their policy?

Information on private health coverage provided by the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman includes advice on health insurance to ensure that the cover is suitable for a student's needs. These include:

- identifying any waiting periods of the private health insurance policies
- checking any restrictions and exclusions of the policy
- considering taking out the highest level of hospital cover you can afford
- checking how much your policy will cover for pharmacy costs
- keeping the selected private health fund aware of any changes to a student's visa status or Medicare eligibility
- keeping the policy paid and up-to-date
- recommending that students contact their health fund to ascertain whether or not they will be covered, and how much they will need to pay before an anticipated health treatment.

In addition to this, Study in Australia also provides information on other types of insurance including travel, home and contents, and vehicle insurance.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government seeks opportunities to promote discussions surrounding the future sustainability and possibilities for international education in Australia and our region, and invites a wide range of stakeholders across the sector, including international students, to participate in these, on a regular and ongoing basis.

Government response: Supported

The Australian Government is developing a National Strategy for International Education that will support a modern, competitive and sustainable Australian international education sector. In April 2015, the Government released for consultation the *Draft National Strategy for International Education* and invited feedback from everyone with an interest in international education. More than 120 organisations, individuals and peak bodies provided written feedback on the Draft Strategy.

The Government established a Coordinating Council for International Education in June 2015 consisting of ministers with portfolio responsibility for international education and six education and industry experts. The Council has overseen the finalisation of the National Strategy for International Education. It worked in close consultation with all interested parties, including through two roundtables on international education.

Roundtable participants included students and representatives from education and training institutions, business and industry, peak bodies and community groups. The outcomes of the roundtables, together with the written feedback on the Draft Strategy, will ensure the final strategy represents a shared national vision that will position Australia as a leader in international education.

A vital part of the National Strategy for International Education is the development of a long-term market development plan for the sector – *Australian International Education (AIE) 2025* to attract international students and visitors to study in Australia and to expand Australia's education and training services offshore.

In April 2015, Austrade conducted consultations in each Australian capital city, as well as Townsville, with 800 representatives from both within the education and training sector and other sectors. These consultations sought input on the vision for a long term market development plan, identification of strategic priorities that would contribute to the achievement of its goals and strategies to develop it as a national plan. The outcomes from these consultations were explored in two roundtables hosted by the Hon Andrew Robb AO MP, Minister for Trade and Investment, in the second half of 2015. The plan will be released in the first half of 2016.