

## **ATN Submission to the Draft National Strategy for International Education**

The **Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN)** welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Commonwealth Government's Draft National Strategy for International Education. This response represents a consensus position of the five ATN universities.

### **Opening comments**

Recent financial circumstances have encouraged more universities in developed countries, including Australia, to grow their international recruitment. There are now many more countries competing for international students, and there are countries that, whilst they remain source countries for recruitment, are also actively recruiting international students themselves. These countries include China, South Korea and Mexico. Some of these countries have ambitions to become top destination countries for higher education and research in their respective region (e.g. Switzerland and China), or are seeking to become international higher education hubs (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia, Korea and Thailand)<sup>1</sup>.

The business of international education in the university sector has therefore become dynamic and highly competitive. To be successful amongst the array of global players will require a targeted and strategic approach by Australia, in conjunction with the ability to respond flexibly and agilely as new opportunities arise.

As an established and influential alliance, the ATN's five member universities are the destination of choice for almost a quarter of the nation's market in international education, making the ATN the largest provider of education to foreign university students in the country, and a respected voice in this area.

The ATN has made a number of recommendations, and has responded to the questions posed in the invitation for submissions. Our recommendations, and question responses are detailed below.

### **Recommendations**

#### *Goal 1: Creating a world-class education system*

The ATN notes that the National Research Priorities<sup>2</sup> and Industry Growth Centres<sup>3</sup> provide the context and focus to maximise investment in world-class research and research infrastructure, and to enhance collaboration between industry and researchers.

The ATN also recommends that ongoing work should be done to ensure that the research agendas of industry and government better align with those of the university sector. With the public-good outcomes inherent in medical research, the strong 'market' created by government funding in this sector is appropriate, as is similar investment in other public-interest sectors such as defence and the environment. However, due attention should also be paid to mapping and better aligning research priorities between industry and universities, for example in engineering and ICT; and also in considering the opportunities present for us to meet the research and innovation needs of our overseas neighbours and partners eg through the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement.

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<sup>1</sup> International student recruitment: policies and developments in selected countries, Nuffic, January 2012, pp85

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/STRATEGIC-SCIENCE-AND-RESEARCH-PRIORITIES\\_181214web.pdf](http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/STRATEGIC-SCIENCE-AND-RESEARCH-PRIORITIES_181214web.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.business.gov.au/advice-and-support/IndustryGrowthCentres/Pages/default.aspx>

The ATN further strongly advocates addressing the misalignment of incentives for universities to collaborate with industry. In particular, measures of research impact and industry engagement should comprise a significant component to measures of university performance, to complement the existing focus on publications and citations. Previous and current work of the ATN and its partners provides useful input in this area: the 2012 – ATN/Go8 ‘*Excellence in Innovation Australia (EIA)*’ trial<sup>4</sup>; the 2015 Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) ‘*Research Engagement for Australia*’ project<sup>5</sup>; and work by the independent ATN Research Industry Advisory Board on impact metrics.

Additionally, the ATN suggests that it is important for Australia to have good brand recognition, and the existence of requisite strength in Austrade to act as an advocate, source of information and support in promoting Australia for higher education internationally will be crucial for success. Promotion could also include breakdown of international rankings by field and using these as a means of promoting those areas where Australia is world-leading.

*Goal 2: Building on strong and emerging international partnerships*

As developed and developing countries seek to increase their supply of university graduates and their transition into knowledge economies, Australian universities and those from other developing countries have perceived considerable opportunity to meet that market demand. It is clear that remaining at the forefront of teaching and research requires close partnership with a range of emerging and established countries.

The ATN believes that building strong and genuinely reciprocal international partnerships with foreign institutions, governments and industry is key to developing new markets internationally. Increasingly Australia’s source countries for recruitment, and our competitors, are focussing on two-way interactions, exchanges and benefits, and Australia needs to enhance its capacity to reciprocate, including through undertaking research collaborations and sending Australian students and academics abroad. This is a message commonly heard in interactions with existing partners including Chinese universities and Chinese government agencies. ATN universities have partnered with Chinese universities that bring significant funding underwriting from national and provincial governments for joint research programs, and while we can bring considerable skill, there is no comparable government funding available.

Reciprocity in action and attitude has also been recently raised in Brazil, where the ATN has a range of MOU’s with state and national Brazilian governments. There is a sensitivity amongst partner countries such as Brazil, and from international students and student organisations, in the depiction of international education predominantly as a major export industry for Australia.

Given Australia’s standing as a developed economy, it will over time stretch credibility with our partners to not bring more significant funds to research partnerships and to not have our students study abroad with them. Additionally, it will be important that Australian universities and the government truly respect and value the sovereign university systems that we engage internationally with, as well as the local communities and industries we partner with in those countries. This means giving greater consideration

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.atn.edu.au/Documents/Publications/Reports/2012/ATN-Go8-Report-web.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.atse.org.au/atse/content/publications/reports/industry-innovation/research-engagement-for-australia.aspx>

to dual degrees offered in true partnership with foreign universities, and genuine professional exchanges through shared academic and research roles eg joint Chairs.

This is a matter of both funding and attitude.

The basis of the ATN is that of institutional partnership that leverages off of individual and emerging strengths. The consortium has a strong international reputation built on global linkages that are achieved by working collaboratively, whilst not impinging upon the individual priorities of member universities. Our initiatives provide a basis for genuine academic and professional exchanges, joint research programs, inward and outward flow of students across international borders, and research outcomes that meet real-world needs, and constitute a proven model for success.

More broadly, the ATN notes that there are often ongoing tensions in the drivers for international education policy settings. Most importantly, there have often been tensions between our immigration and visa settings and the view of international education primarily through an export income lens. Further discussion is required to achieve policy settings that harmonise our immigration and international education policies, whilst also ensuring high quality and appropriate student support infrastructure, and genuine integration of international students and graduates into Australian life.

With relation to geographical matters, in acknowledging that the potential that exists for expansion of opportunity into Latin America, the Middle East and Africa, the Strategy could usefully provide more detail on proposed government assistance to facilitate this process.

### Goal 3: Fostering an international outlook

Within the broad goal of fostering an international outlook to better prepare Australian students and researchers for global engagement, the ATN has broadly supported the New Colombo Plan.

The ATN notes, however, that investing the time and money in university education is today a very significant investment for Australian students, and for many students their aim is to complete their degree and find relevant employment in the shortest possible timeframe. It has proven difficult for Australian universities to attract students to overseas mobility programs- particularly Asian focused ones

In calling for greater government support for domestic students to have international education experiences, the ATN notes that any programs involving time abroad, particularly in developing countries should include:

- the provision of course credit and other appropriate incorporation into the program of study the student is already undertaking
- appropriate levels of funding/scholarships to students so there are no significant out-of-pocket expenses
- timing arrangements that work around academic year timetables as well as professional industry placement requirements for students in the advanced years of their degrees
- availability of safe and secure accommodation and access to support services, and
- career-relevant industry experiences.

#### Goal 4: Attracting international talent

The ATN believes that brand and market position are crucial in attracting talented students and researchers to Australia. Potential investment in our education and research offerings will come from and through a range of international consumers: students and their families; overseas universities and their academics; international university-sector agents; foreign governments; and offshore industries and employers. Differentiated strategies and individual 'client' management approaches targeted to each potential strand of inward investment should be developed, both by universities and the government, and assistance and intelligence made available through government agencies to individual institutions.

In countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Singapore, international student recruitment is closely interlinked with national economic and research agendas. In Germany and Singapore, the national economic and research agendas drive international student recruitment, and Swiss policy strategies link international student recruitment closely to the bilateral research collaborations of Swiss higher education institutions<sup>6</sup>. Switzerland and Singapore have also created a high-quality research infrastructure, which is attractive to talented students and researchers. This strategy of closely linking international student recruitment and national economic and research strategies into one coherent strategy may be an effective way for Australia to attract talented students and researchers.

#### Goal 5: Ensuring a positive and rewarding student experience

ATN universities monitor the quality of education of all students and are equally concerned about the experiences of domestic and international students. Instruments such as the *International Student Barometer* and *Student Barometer* provide useful benchmarking tools to track international and domestic student experiences.<sup>7</sup>

The ATN advocates for the necessary ongoing focus to ensure quality compliance by education providers in the sector but without unnecessarily constraining the majority of providers who uphold all of the necessary consumer protections and quality standards.

#### Goal 6: Embracing opportunities to grow international education

Australian universities are not new to the international business. On many measures, the sector is already hugely internationalised. For example, it has been known for some time that around half of all Australian scientific publications are co-authored with overseas collaborators. Furthermore, there is a shift in the way Australian scientists are engaging with the rest of the world. Whilst we have historically had strong ties with North America and Europe, there has been much faster recent growth with our Asian neighbours. In mathematics, engineering and chemistry for example, China is now our strongest partner in collaboration<sup>8</sup>.

Australian universities, like universities globally, are also redesigning their curriculum to ensure the internationalisation of our education. Courses at ATN universities increasingly include study abroad options, international work experience, intercultural competence and study tours.

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<sup>6</sup> International student recruitment: policies and developments in selected countries, Nuffic, January 2012, pp53

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.i-graduate.org/services/international-student-barometer/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.chiefscientist.gov.au/2012/05/the-value-of-science-diplomacy/>

However, the Strategy should also more specifically refer to transnational education, noting the issues affecting this area - ensuring that models are developed that adequately address legal, quality, and infrastructure issues, and creating resources that support the development of sound business cases for expansion through transnational offerings.

The ATN recommends that in developing and operationalising a new national strategy for international education, the government make every effort to tap into the significant expertise, knowledge and linkages already in existence within many Australian universities.

There are some fundamental modes of operation which the ATN advocates for success in growing international partnerships for teaching and research:

- The ATN recognises the necessity of cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research to deliver practical research solutions of international significance. Our members collaborate extensively around focussed areas of research excellence and, as an alliance, we leverage this excellence into strategic collaborations with top tier international partners.
- The ATN is committed to applying an 'end-user approach' to address research challenges in the world. This model has made the ATN an attractive partner of choice by business, government and industry when research solutions are required, and has enabled us to form valuable international research linkages.

### **Responses to questions posed to stakeholders**

#### **Does the vision statement in the draft strategy represent Australia's aspirations for international education?**

The vision statement should more strongly reflect the value we place on international education as a nation, both in economic terms and for international standing, but more particularly as existing and potential global partners, keen to participate in the richness, diversity and opportunity that international education opens up to our nation. However, the points made above about the need to maintain accord between immigration and visa settings and international education goals are crucial if the vision is to be realised.

#### **Are any significant goals for international education not adequately covered?**

##### Maximising value out of our international networks

Australia should do more to better integrate into our communities and markets the diverse and valuable networks that international students bring with them. More could be done by government to open doors for parallel inward investment from the families and employers of international students- capitalising on the strong bond that can form between an international student and their host country or city, and the fact that many international students spend multiple years studying here, with time for associated business and personal networks to flourish if properly nurtured.

### Providing an 'onshore international education experience'

There remains huge untapped potential for domestic students to benefit even further from the wealth of global knowledge, skills and cultures that come to Australia through its international students. Too often, international students and domestic students operate in their own silos, with minimal genuine interaction.

A broader narrative is required about the value of international students in our community, of international engagement and of our need to be more competent in cross-cultural relations personally and professionally. More specifically, a supporting suite of programs could be offered by individual institutions and the government, that bring together domestic and international students, their teachers and community supports in a more structured way, designed to maximise the opportunity to broaden our perspectives, create meaningful personal connections and build shared understanding.

### **What would you like to see progressed as a priority in the first year?**

There has been a lack of continuity in the manner in which Australian national governments, of both persuasions, have tackled international education and this confuses current and potential students. The ongoing debate around deregulation brings with it major uncertainty for university administrators and participants in higher education. With the matter of deregulation of the industry still unresolved, and with respect to international education, the ATN advocates that any new policy settings being considered should not unduly impede universities from acting in their individual interests, including commercial interests. In particular, it will be important not to limit universities' recruitment of international students, recognising that in this very competitive environment, an attempt to do so would be difficult to implement without severely damaging the international education industry. Ensuring that immigration policy settings do not impede international education goals is the highest priority.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The ATN Directorate can provide more detail on the content of this submission upon request.

The ATN group of universities is committed to working proactively in partnership with government, industry and the community to deliver sustainable solutions, and, importantly, results for the long term in enhancing international education in Australia.