

AUSTRALIA

Schools are the new battleground for foreign students

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School education should be used as a recruiting ground for foreign students to secure higher education enrolments, according to a Victoria government paper published on Tuesday. School education should be used as a recruiting ground for foreign students to secure higher education enrolments, according to a Victoria government [paper](#) published on Tuesday.

Increasing the capacity of schools to deliver the Victorian Certificate of Education, or VCE, to more international students around the world would ensure more foreign students applied to study in Victoria's universities, the discussion paper for the Future Industries Fund said.

"An investment in the development of the Northern Hemisphere timetable represents a significant opportunity for our schools in delivering the VCE offshore, but also as a pathway for well-prepared students who have completed the VCE offshore to enter our universities," the paper said.

"Creating more opportunities for students around the world to engage with our world-class schooling system benefits not only the schools who are delivering these programmes, but also feeds directly into further pathways into our higher education institutions."

Currently the VCE is being delivered by more than 30 partners around the globe to thousands of students.

Go younger

At the same time there is the potential to build on the more than 5,000 full-paying international students enrolling in Victorian schools with "high transition rates into onshore higher education programmes".

"The 'go younger' trend, particularly from international students from China, means that increasingly parents are seeking to send their children abroad to study from a younger age, to help them build their English language skills, build friendships and networks, and acclimatise so that they are a step ahead of the competition when they are entering university," the paper says. "Victoria needs to be prepared to respond to this trend."

The paper advocates increasing the number of places within the school system, ensuring high levels of English language provision and exploring new models of student accommodation as part of a strategy to realise "significant growth" in the school sector of the international student market.

International education has been Victoria's largest services export industry for more than a decade. It contributed A\$4.7 billion (US\$3.5 billion) to the Victorian economy last year, supporting an estimated 30,000 full-time equivalent jobs, mostly in Melbourne.

But there is a growing opportunity to capitalise on Victoria's pioneering efforts in delivering higher education offshore and via partnerships, the increasing demand for 'offshore' and online English language learning, and the growth of delivery models for higher education, for instance by 'blended' online and offshore learning.

The government expects growing global demand for education services will see more than

seven million higher education students studying abroad by 2020, with demand for international online education also rising.

But Minister for Training and Skills Steve Herbert warned that Victoria's position in international education could not be taken for granted. "International education is a highly dynamic market with fast changing consumer preferences," he said.

Rivals emerging

The paper identified ambitious growth targets among countries competing with Australia for foreign talent and emerging rivals.

Canada aims to double the number of international students to 450,000 by 2022; the UK seeks to increase the number it attracts by 90,000 over the next three years; and New Zealand aims to double the value of its education exports over 15 years to around A\$10 billion per year.

At the same time Malaysia is trying to attract 200,000 students by 2020; Taiwan is seeking to lure 130,000, twice the current amount, by 2022; China aims to attract 500,000 by 2020, compared to 300,000 now; and Germany is hoping to attract 350,000 international students by 2020.

Currently Victoria's two biggest markets are China and India, which are the source, respectively, of 28.1% and 16.4% of its international students.

The minister's warning was echoed by an umbrella group for the business, academic and community sectors, which said that increasingly aggressive competition is opening up worldwide in the sector.

The Committee for Melbourne, an independent umbrella group for more than 130 business, academic and community organisations, launched a strategy paper, also on Tuesday, identifying priorities for improving Melbourne's "brand and value proposition as a destination for international students".

Committee for Melbourne CEO Kate Roffey said the international education sector is a key "economic driver and cultural connector".

However, she said, there were signs of competition hotting up worldwide.

"While we have always competed with markets like the UK and New Zealand, some very strong moves by the US to significantly increase the number of international students studying onshore should have us sitting up and taking notice," she said.

While Melbourne could offer world-class international education institutions, living costs are relatively high, the jobs market is tight and the accommodation market is not providing enough affordable options, she said.

"So we have work to do to retain and build on our hard-earned status as one of the world's top international student destinations," Roffey said.

Current Victorian Government commitments to international education include marketing activities such as posting eight Education Service Managers in key locations across the globe, investing A\$12 million in inbound trade missions, and hosting the international education awards.

Its attempts to provide a high-quality student experience include the setting up of A\$4 million International Student Welfare Grants, a three-year trial of a public transport ticket scheme for international students, the creating of more employability and work experience opportunities, including internships, and improved efforts to engage with international student alumni.

The Committee of Melbourne's strategy paper, *Melbourne – A Prosperous Future: World-leading international student city*, suggests there is a need to improve connections between international students and job opportunities and to address shortcomings in English language proficiency outcomes.

It advocates various ways of improving students' experiences of living in Melbourne.

These include finding more suitable and less costly accommodation for international students; giving them the same concessions on access to public transport enjoyed by domestic students; working harder to encourage international students' engagement with the local community; promoting Melbourne's "record as a safe city"; and providing more easily understood and readily accessible information for international students online and face to face.

Potential growth markets

According to the government paper, Indonesia, the Philippines and Latin America offer potential growth markets from which Victorian universities could attract more international students.

Currently international students make up around a third of the student body in universities in the state and around one in two international students are postgraduate students, many of them attracted to Victoria's position as "the research capital of Australia – particularly in health and the life sciences – and home to major research infrastructure such as the Australian Synchrotron", the paper says.

"Offshore" and online delivery is increasingly providing an attractive pathway for students to move on to study "onshore" in Victoria. As part of these activities, Victorian universities are also collaborating with foreign partners to develop new teaching and research activity, such as dual degrees and licensed curriculum delivery, that will enable Victorian education and research to "reach right across the globe", the paper said.

"In the next decade, models of education delivery, teaching and learning will continue to be transformed. How well Victorian institutions fully embrace and embed offshore and online delivery will be key success factors for the sustainability of the sector."

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