

Victorian schools the future for international student market

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International students should be enrolled in more Victorian schools to help boost the state's \$4.7 billion foreign education sector over the coming decades, a government paper has suggested.

As the global race for a foothold in the "Asian education boom" heats up, there are warnings of growing competition from other English-speaking countries.

Australia is at risk of lagging behind major competitors Canada, Britain and the US, which are aggressively raising their international student targets.

Increasing capacity in the Victorian school system to accommodate more international students would help secure higher education enrolments, the paper, released on Tuesday says.

This would cater to a so-called "go younger" trend, whereby parents from mainland China seek to send their kids to Australia early, to build their English language skills.

From March 2015, there were 5055 full-fee-paying international students enrolled in Victorian schools, with several thousand students visiting Victoria a year under sister-school and exchange programs.

More than 4000 overseas-based students have enrolled in the VCE since 1998.

The government paper coincided with a Committee for Melbourne report that aims to set out a plan to protect Melbourne's international education sector, including from greater overseas competition.

In the US, there are moves to grant six-year work rights to international students once they graduate, which would boost foreign enrolments.

The committee's report highlights the need for governments and business to open up work opportunities for international students while studying and once they graduate.

The chance to improve spoken English is a major drawcard for Australian universities but many students are leaving without much improvement, and then telling people back home of their experiences.

Committee for Melbourne chief executive Kate Roffey said groups like the Council for the Ageing could help with conversational English classes with international students, through simple conversation sessions.

Ms Roffey said cultural engagement for students must improve.

Sporting clubs could also play a role by having volunteers take international students to matches.

"It is no good just giving them free tickets," Ms Roffey said. "We need people to explain what is going on."

Another reason for the poor English results is that students are often living in accommodation with their compatriots so English is not spoken.

Overall insufficient accommodation remains a problem, with many students reporting that they are not getting value for money.

As Melbourne is already grappling with overcrowded apartments, getting student specific accommodation is key, as well as cracking down on those who exploit renters.

Victorian education providers should also look beyond traditional markets such as China and India for enrolments, and appeal to students in Latin America, the Philippines and Indonesia, the government paper said. This would help shield the industry from "shocks or downturns" in Asian markets.

Victorian Association of State Secondary Schools Principals president Judy Crowe said inner-city schools that were popular with international students did not have the capacity for more places. But there was appetite for foreign student enrolments in schools outside of the city.

Ms Crowe called on the government to fund the schools' marketing campaigns overseas.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/victorian-schools-the-future-for-international-student-market-20150714-gic7df.html>