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Response to the draft National Strategy for International Education

Introductory remarks

The overall intent and structure of the strategy is very good. The three pillars and supporting goals support the vision and the strategic actions are a logical progression.

This is an opportunity to be more aspirational; we should aim to be in the Top Three as a study destination and Number One for transnational partnerships.

To achieve this there needs to be goal which promotes not just pathways programs between sectors but supports partnerships between providers under a whole of education sector approach. For example, the German government provides up to 250,000 euros per year for institutions aiming to strengthen their international profile. Australia could develop a program which supports cross-sectoral initiatives, particularly for transnational education.

The document makes a clear distinction between universities and other higher education providers but makes no such distinction in the vocational education and training sector. It is imperative the role, achievements and potential of TAFE to maintain a leading role in international education is clearly articulated and supported.

While there is a clear acknowledgement of the role of the states and territories and the opportunities to work together with the Commonwealth, competing interests are not fully addressed. There is one example in the draft strategy which highlights the possibilities; the establishment of offshore hubs where Federal, state and territory representatives share facilities and work together to promote Australian education services.

The different sectors within education are often treated as distinct and separate entities. Many institutions are in fact cross-sectoral or have formalised partnerships with other sectoral institutions. This provides an opportunity for innovative approaches to promoting and exporting our products and services which are not clearly articulated in the draft strategy.

The role of industry and employers from other sectors is limited to work experience opportunities and investment in student housing. There is much more other industry sectors can contribute

including strategic alliances with education providers both on and offshore. We have included a number of case studies in our response which illustrate the value and importance of such strategic alliances.

The measures of success are very broad with no quantifiable measures other than 'higher', 'more', 'improved' or 'greater'. Little focus is given to the quality of the improvements or increases.

There is no mention of any financial investment or support for any of these measures. While acknowledging such a strategy document should not commit governments to specific budget measures, it is worth noting the May 2015 Federal Budget announced the closure of a number of programs which support international education. For example:

- The Regional Links and Increasing the Profile of Australia's International Education Sector (IPAIES) programmes will cease from 2015–16 with remaining multi-year IPAIES contracts continuing to 2018–19.
- The Professional Service Development Programme and the Assessment Subsidy for Overseas Trained Professionals will also cease from 2015–16.

These cancellations of these four programmes will provide a combined saving of approximately \$12.7 million over the forward estimates.

- All visitors applying for a visa offshore will pay additional costs for their application charges, with the government raising \$437.1 million over four years. Visitors from China will see their application fees increase from \$130 to \$135, with that market alone footing a \$5 million bill, while working holiday makers will be paying an additional \$5 million as their application fees increase from \$420 to \$440.
- Scholarships for mobility go from 6,205 to 3,100 per year, but with an increase in New Colombo Plan scholarships which are currently only accessible to university students
- The Education and Training portfolio will have funding reduced by \$131 million over four years
- The Emerging Markets Development Grant allocations over the forward estimates remain static indicating a reduction in available funds
- The Asian Business Engagement Plan will cease with no further application rounds.

We would expect a supplementary budget allocation to international education following the finalisation of the National Strategy, aligned to first year priorities as determined by the newly formed Coordinating Council for International Education.

The draft strategy does give us a solid basis for further discussion and development of specific actions. Such actions should be based on sustainable growth with quality outcomes.

Response to the consultation questions

Does the vision statement ... represent Australia's aspirations for international education?

The vision is internally focussed – what is the benefit to Australia? While this is a perfectly reasonable position to take, our vision could be much more.

It is worth noting other vision statements which have a similar intent:

Canada – “harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity”

UK – “Global growth and prosperity”

New Zealand – “doubling the economic value of international education including mutually beneficial relationships”

British Columbia – “Fosters social benefits and economic prosperity for all citizens”

Victoria (Australia) - “strengthening Victoria as a globally competitive services economy”

It is important to recognise mutual benefit, reciprocity and true exchanges in the vision. There should be a clear intention to be globally connected and globally committed. Two alternatives have been suggested by our members:

“Australian international education is connected and committed to social and economic advancement both at home and abroad.”

“International Education is integral to Australia's global engagement, social advancement and economic prosperity.”

Such statements emphasise both economic and social imperatives which encompass mutual benefit.

Are any significant goals not adequately covered?

Goal 1: Creating a world-class education system

Action 1.2 The vocational education and training (VET) sector is significantly compromised by national partnership agreements between Federal and state/territory governments which vary considerably in their approach and application. A more consistent approach to governance arrangements, funding allocations and community service obligations is essential to further developing our VET system.

Action 1.2 Investing in world-class research and research infrastructure is not the sole preserve of the university sector and yet most of the actions articulated in this section assume this to be the case. The pivotal role and potential of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) to support research into international education should be recognised and expanded. Transnational research initiatives such as recent collaborations between TAFE Directors Australia and China's Central Institute for Vocational Training and Education and with UNESCO's UNEVOC

currently lack any substantial Commonwealth support. This contrasts with significant support for university-led Australian Studies Centres in China and multiple transnational research grants.

Action 1.3 TDA strongly supports the expansion of data collection and analysis and recommends further discussions on including both on and offshore international students in the Unique Student Identifier process.

The support, recognition and reward for excellence and innovation in teaching and learning should not be restricted to the Office for Learning and Teaching which to date has focused exclusively on the university sector.

Action 1.4 The VET sector has more than 4,800 registered training organisations with over 1,200 registered to deliver services for overseas students. There is no formal distinction in the quality of these institutions and the reporting and compliance burden remains the same. To reduce red tape, TDA supports the introduction of categories of VET providers where regulatory control is focused on new and high risk institutions.

Goal 2: Building on strong and emerging international partnerships

Action 2.1 TAFE leads the VET sector in establishing and supporting international partnerships. In some countries, TAFE institutes are the first Australian provider to enter the market. We develop and maintain a wide range of international networks which promote the exchange of people and ideas.

The TAFE brand is highly visible overseas and the national strategy should recognise and support the importance of this.

There is no mention of the potential for cross-sectoral partnerships. For example, Australian universities, TAFE institutes and schools have a significant presence in some offshore markets and yet there is no clear direction or incentive to work together to leverage this presence. There is a real opportunity for Federal and state/territory governments to actively promote and support cross-sectoral partnerships.

Equally Australian companies and other industry service providers have a limited engagement offshore with our education providers. A dedicated campaign to promote offshore linkages between industry and education would be a first step in enhancing strong and emerging international partnerships.

Action 2.2 As noted in our response to Action 1.2, research is not exclusive to universities or the broader higher education sector. In fact, the collaborations between TAFE and independent researchers offer a significant opportunity to raise our profile as world-class applied research partners. TDA research into the productivity gains from investment in vocational education and training and research into skills for sustainable development are just two examples of this potential.

Action 2.3 The greatest challenge in government to government engagement is one of coordination between Australian government ministries and departments. We strongly support the creation of the Ministerial Coordinating Council and bi-annual roundtables.

We also note a specific action relating to Australia's overseas development aid program. To achieve our strategic goals in enhancing the reputation of our education sector and building our capabilities, it is essential that Australian education institutions become a mandatory partner in any education-focused aid program.

Action 2.4 TDA supports broadening our engagement beyond the Asian region, something our TAFE institutes are already leading. To maximise new opportunities, TDA recommends a series of workshops sponsored by the Federal and state/territory governments to develop country-specific strategies for all education sectors. Such workshops should also include Australian companies and businesses currently operating in or planning to engage with specific countries.

Goal 3: Fostering an international outlook

Action 3.1 emphasises the value and importance of the New Colombo Plan and the strategy should flag the extension of the program to at least non-university higher education providers. There are a significant number of TAFE higher education students who would greatly benefit from access to this program where advanced technical skills are valued and promoted.

There is limited attention given to the value of scholarships for overseas students. For example, the USA government has just announced the provision of 10,000 scholarships for Chinese vocational students to study in the USA. The Chinese government is in the fourth year of providing scholarships for their vocational leaders to study in Australia, Germany, Canada, the UK or the USA. Australia alone has hosted over 130 of these leaders with direct funding of over \$500,000 from China to Australian TAFE institutions.

OS-HELP loans should be extended to students studying advanced technical skill programs at Advanced Diploma level and above.

Action 3.2 TDA strongly supports a stronger focus on the study of languages other than English.

Goal 4: Attracting international talent

Action 4.1 As countries further develop or transition their economies, a greater awareness of the need for a strong yet flexible VET system develops. Australia has a unique opportunity to showcase our own development and encourage international talent to study with us. Teacher and student exchange programs, applied researchers and scholarships are just as important to those in the VET sector as those in higher education.

Action 4.2 TDA supports current initiatives in supporting and accrediting education agents. We also endorse the promotional role Austrade plays although a greater emphasis on the value of a VET qualification is required.

Action 4.3 Australian TAFEs support international student alumni networks with an increasing use of social media as the primary platform. On this basis we strongly support the development of an Australian Global Alumni Network.

Goal 5: Ensuring a positive and rewarding student experience

Action 5.1 There is an urgent need for a comparative analysis of student visa programs in our main competitor countries. For example, the USA now offers a 10 year study visa; Canada has a specific visa for Chinese students to study with their community colleges, the equivalent of our TAFEs. The pricing of visas is also contentious, particularly for those moving from one visa sub class to another if not packaged at the outset.

TDA has previously submitted a proposal to the review of Australia's student visa program where a single "Australian Study Visa" would be issued with a range of terms and conditions attached. This simplification of the multiple visa subclasses would greatly enhance the attractiveness of studying in Australia.

The current arrangements where some institutions have access to streamlined visa processing has distorted the market and greatly disadvantaged many of our TAFE institutes. Most of the growth in our international student numbers is now attributable to packaged courses with universities.

The Tuition Protection Service (TPS), while providing a high level of security for international students, has not functioned to the benefit of providers which fund the service. Between July 2012 and June 2014, only 69 students have been placed in an alternative course while 580 students have received refunds.

The cost of administering the service has been at least \$1.18m and refunds have totalled \$1.18m. The contribution from providers totalled \$12.5m and the TPS now has just under \$12m in available funds. TDA is currently responding to a review of the TPS; in the interim, TDA recommends at least 10% of this fund be made available to support international students who suffer financial hardship due to events such as the recent earthquake in Nepal.

Action 5.2 TDA strongly supports initiatives which increase the opportunity for work experience, internships and other work and study related activities for international students. Our current visa regime is too restrictive and at times discriminatory. For example, VET graduates are restricted to 18 months post-study work rights in the same area of their studies, whereas university graduates can work in any field for up to 24 months.

Action 5.3 TDA supports any initiative which directly assists international students in improving their level of English language competency.

Action 5.4 International students studying in Australia should have the same transport entitlements and processes as domestic students.

Action 5.5 There is a strong belief in some areas of government that Australia can double the number of international students in 10 years. While such growth is financially attractive it is essential our cities and towns have suitable infrastructure and support mechanisms in place. This includes suitable accommodation, transport, health care, counselling, legal advice and advocacy.

TDA recommends the Ministerial Coordinating Council convenes a fixed term working party to assess what level of international student numbers is sustainable in our primary city destinations.

Action 5.6 TAFE institutes actively engage our international students in the local community, from the moment they arrive in Australia to the time they return home. The work of the Council of International Students Australia (CISA) has also played a key role in engaging with local communities.

TDA supports any initiative which will enhance our ability to extend and improve such services.

Goal 6: Embracing opportunities to grow international education

Action 6.1 Online and mixed modes of delivery have been well established in our TAFE institutes for over 15 years. We are well aware of the challenges for all students in studying online with completion rates well below those where study includes a face to face or work-based component. These completion rates are also significantly lower in most of the current MOOCs, despite the one example given in the draft strategy.

TDA supports the adoption of new technologies and delivery platforms, particularly relevant to our offshore partnerships where audio and video conferencing supplement classroom and work based learning. TDA would welcome a specific study into expanding the AARNET to offshore delivery of VET qualifications.

Action 6.2 The role of Austrade should be extended beyond marketing and promotion to actively linking industry sectors with education. To date the focus has been on promoting educational partnerships and attracting more international students and less attention given to forging links between Australian companies and education providers.

Our offshore engagement will be greatly enhanced if Australian companies operating overseas or intending to reach new overseas markets were linked with Australian universities, TAFE institutes and schools which are already in many offshore markets. Our services could include workforce training, strategies for meeting community service obligations, and pathways from local education to employment.

TDA is aware of a range of Federal government initiatives in benchmarking qualifications in the ASEAN region and the development of international versions of our Australian VET qualifications. To date there has been limited involvement of our TAFE institutes, despite the fact we have been actively engaged offshore delivering qualifications and benchmarking these to local courses.

Can you identify the strategic actions which best support your goals for international education?

All the actions support our goals as a TAFE sector, including the research focused ones; over 20 of our TAFE colleges/institutes now deliver higher education qualifications and there is an increasing research capacity in the VET sector.

What are the best measures of success?

The document uses very broad terms for measuring success: increased, higher, more, improved, greater.

We need more explicit indicators of success which also emphasise the quality of outcomes, not just the numbers or percentages.

Growth by itself is not a good measure; we must ensure our growth is sustainable, diversified and provides an economic and social value to both the provider and the consumer. Equally our growth must enhance our relations with other countries where the return is measured not just in income but in the health of our bilateral and multilateral relationships.

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

Priority should be given to offshore partnerships and other transnational activities with specific incentives for cross-sectoral and education/industry initiatives.

The Coordinating Council should also convene a number of fixed-period working parties to review and recommend specific actions in the following areas:

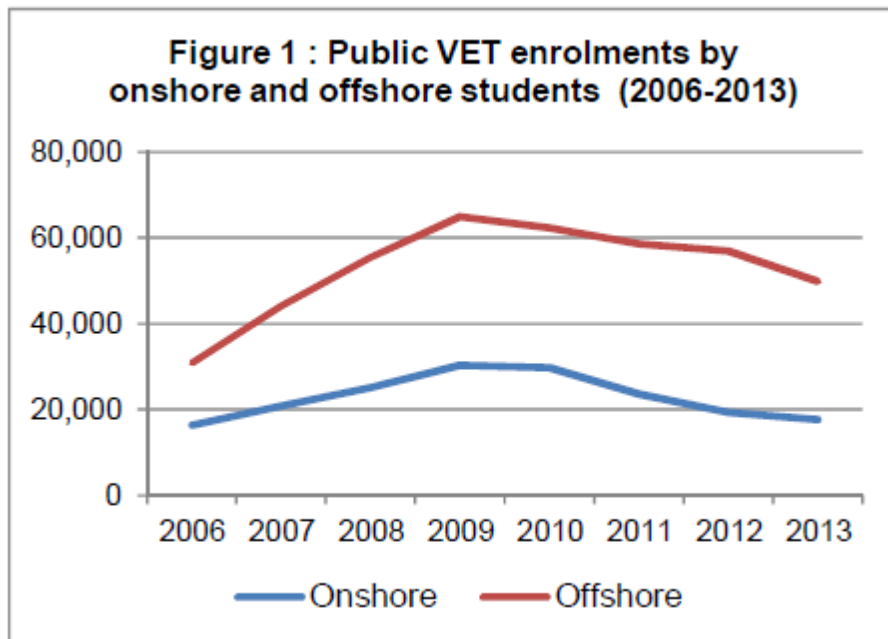
- country by country action plans incorporating specific actions by Federal, state and territory governments and their relevant agencies, peak bodies, industry associations, providers and other key stakeholders
- essential factors for sustainable growth in onshore international student numbers.

Case Studies which illustrate our success to date

TAFE institutes have an outstanding track record in international education. TAFE institutes have been awarded the International Training Provider of the Year in each of the first three years of this award (Sydney TAFE, Box Hill Institute of TAFE and Central Institute of Technology).

International students

TAFE institutes do much more than recruit and support international students to study in Australia. In fact we have a relatively small number of international students, representing less than 5% of our total student cohort and less than 15% of the total number of international VET students in Australia. By contrast, we have the most numbers of students studying a VET qualification offshore, representing more than double the number of international students studying with us in Australia.



Ref: Transnational education in the public VET sector; Department of Education and Training; February 2015

Mobility programs

TAFE institutes are actively engaged in student mobility programs through the Endeavour Program and the VET Mobility Grants. For example, our pastry students have studied in Shanghai and Paris, our media students have attended the TriBeca festival in New York, and our carpentry students have built new school facilities in Indonesia. In 2014, as part of the VET Mobility Grants and Endeavour Program, over 40 Holmesglen Institute students were engaged in mobility programs covering a wide

range of vocational study areas – Hospitality, Tourism, Health Sciences and Business and in regions across Asia - China, Fiji, Cambodia, Singapore and Thailand

We are also actively involved in the World Skills competition, both as contestants and judges. Our hospitality students won awards in Leipzig Germany in 2013 and then promoted the competition and their skills in India in 2014.

Partnership programs

Based on a 2013 TDA survey commissioned by Austrade, 22 of our TAFE institutes have 161 active partnerships overseas.

TAFE offshore partnerships

| TAFE Survey 2013 (funded by Austrade) 22 institutes - 161 offshore partnerships | | NCVER |
|--|----|-------------------|
| Partnerships (Top 6) | | Offshore students |
| China | 91 | 42,097 |
| PNG | 15 | 831 |
| South Korea | 7 | 862 |
| Malaysia | 4 | 781 |
| Singapore | 4 | 464 |
| India | 3 | 241 |
| Students offshore | | 57,122 |

Approximately 20,000 inbound international students in 2014

Capacity building –

For example, Melbourne Polytechnic has the highest number of partnerships in China, delivering a range of business, finance and management courses to over 20,000 students. Chisholm Institute, Angliss Institute and Central Institute of Technology are also very active in China.

In 2013, Holmesglen initiated articulation programs recognising Chinese vocational qualifications, thus providing a seamless pathway to further vocational and higher education study at Holmesglen.

Angliss Institute has a tourism and hospitality college in Singapore, TAFE NSW established a vocational training institution in Abu Dhabi, and Challenger Institute is working with the Kazakhstan government to establish two world class colleges. Box Hill Institute continues to manage the Australia Pacific Technical College, headquartered in Fiji.

TAFE SA has recently formed a partnership with a major private education provider in India.

Central Institute of Technology in WA recently completed a project in India working with the schools sector and TAFE Queensland has multiple offshore partnerships in the Middle East and the Pacific region.

Industry engagement

Our institutes work directly with companies in other countries; Holmesglen Institute provided GMR, India with a customised Master Trainer program in the building and construction areas to meet Indian industry requirements. They are also contracted by Rio Tinto at their major Oyu Tolgoi mine site to deliver training in engineering and electrical trades and with the Qatar Central Bank in Doha to deliver training in banking and finance.

Challenger Institute has a long standing program in Qatar and Federation University, through a recent merger with GippsTAFE, run multiple projects in PNG for major Australian mining companies.

Sydney TAFE embarked on an innovative project for BlueScope Steel in Thailand where worksite training was delivered for construction workers. A fully equipped semi-trailer travelled to each worksite with Sydney TAFE teachers demonstrating safe and effective installation procedures.

Both Sydney TAFE and Holmesglen have significant partnerships in Malaysia.

Capacity Building

Over 30 TAFE institutes have provided training and mentoring for TDA's leadership program for overseas college directors. To date over 130 Chinese college principals, 40 Indonesian Polytechnic directors, and 60 Indian community college leaders have completed this program.

Kangan Bendigo Institute is delivering master trainer programs in Taiwan as part of a broader TDA consultancy with Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute and the Workforce Development Agency.

Angliss Institute has developed hospitality and tourism competency profiles for an ASEAN initiative.

In 2014, TDA conducted workshops on behalf of the InterAmerican Development in five Latin American countries. The workshops focused on skills for productivity and were attended by senior government officials, public and private providers, and industry representatives.

Sydney TAFE is training trainers in Indonesia who will deliver workshops on ethical procurement practices to multiple government departments and agencies.

Networking and Relationship building

TasTAFE will host a delegation of over 100 Chinese college leaders in September this year with direct support from the Tasmanian government. Western Australia, South Australia and Victorian governments have recently led delegations to China, India and Latin America respectively.

TDA has a significant number of international networks and has formal representation on the Board of the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics. We are a coordinating centre for UNESCO's UNEVOC centre and manage both a Green Skills international network and a bilateral higher education network with the USA's community college baccalaureate association.

A summary of our current networks and projects is presented below:

International engagement

Formal agreements and associations:

- *American Association of Community Colleges*
- *Association of Colleges (UK)*
- *Chile Ministry of Education*
- *China Education Association for International Exchange*
- *Colleges and Institutes Canada*
- *Colombia Ministry of Education*
- *Commonwealth Secretariat, UK*
- *Community College Baccalaureate Association*
- *India Ministry of Human Resource Development*
- *India University Grants Commission*
- *Indonesia Millennium Challenge Account (with Booz Allen Hamilton)*
- *Indonesian Ministry of Education & Culture and Ministry of Manpower & Transmigration*
- *Kasipkor Holdings, Republic of Kazakhstan*
- *Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training*
- *Mixed Economy Group (UK)*
- *Taiwan Workforce Development Agency*
- *UNESCO UNEVOC – Pacific Cluster Coordinator*
- *World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics.*



TDA Projects (2014-15)

- *Asian Business Engagement Project – Myanmar leadership program*
- *Australia/China Skills Research Centre*
- *China Leadership Program & Student Exchange program*
- *India Vocational Mentoring Program*
- *International Green Skills network (USA, China)*
- *Indonesia Train the Trainer*
- *Kazakhstan curriculum and teacher development*
- *Latin American seminars & workshops (six countries)*
- *TAFE Higher Education Network (USA, Canada, UK, China)*
- *Taiwan consultancy services in TVET reform & teacher training.*