



**Association of International Education Administrators**  
*Leaders in International Higher Education*

**Developing Global Citizens—an Australian Perspective**

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The eminent Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey famously identified the “tyranny of distance” as a defining factor in shaping Australia’s past and in determining its future. Because Australia was “at the end of the line”, with long travel times to even our closest neighbour, Australia tended to be inward-looking, with high barriers to international trade and little engagement with Asia, the Americas and Europe.

This situation has changed markedly over the last 25 years. International education in particular is an exemplar of a connected rather than isolated Australia. Many of our leading universities are now genuinely global education hubs, better known for their proximity to and deep connections with the growth economies of Asia rather than their geographic isolation. In terms of sheer numbers of international students, Australia is a middle-sized player in today’s global education market. However, we host the largest proportion of international students in the OECD, with roughly one in five students on our campuses from overseas. International education is the nation’s third largest export industry.

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) was one of the first Australian universities to actively enrol international students. We have a proud history of engagement with Asia, with some 25 per cent of the total student cohort international.

Australian universities over the last 12 months have been hit by declining international student enrolments. There are short-term cyclical factors at play, among them a high Australian dollar, changes in our visa regime and a few incidents that provided a misleading and inaccurate perception of Australia’s reputation as a safe destination. In addition, there are longer-term structural challenges confronting not only Australia but education providers in other major education destination nations like the US, Canada and the United Kingdom.

Massive investments in tertiary education in China and other developing countries, as well as new challenges such as burgeoning online education options, means our international student base, and the diversity and income it brings, cannot be taken for granted. To address these issues, three questions must be answered. First, why has Australia been so

successful? Second, what are the main challenges we now face? And, third, how might we more effectively respond by developing 'Global Citizens'?

### **Australian experience**

Success in building up an area of social and economic activity can come from a grand concept or emerge as the result of "logical incrementalism". The development of international education in Australia falls squarely into the logical incrementalism category.

Australia first began educating international students in the 1950s under major scholarship and subsidised programs funded by the Australian Government and selected Australian universities, such as UNSW and the University of Queensland, Adelaide and Melbourne. We pursued this initiative because we wanted to be a good neighbour, helping post-war development in our region. But universities also recognised the opportunity presented by the Colombo Plan, under which foreign students were supported by the Australian Government.

At UNSW we began taking international students in 1952, only 3 years after the university was established. The results were extremely positive, establishing firm bonds between Australia and our regional neighbours. UNSW now counts several Ministers of Asian governments as alumni.

The mid-1980s saw two important developments that accelerated the flow of overseas students to Australia. Firstly, the Hawke Government opened Australia's public tertiary education providers to fee-paying international students. Subsequently, the Keating Government articulated the vision of turning Australia's attention, with respect to trade and engagement, towards Asia rather than Europe. Our heritage may have been European, but our future was seen as Asia-Pacific. Secondly, education became an important "export industry" worldwide. Large numbers of students from the rapidly industrialising Asian nations enrolled in Australian universities as full-fee-paying students. This income stream became increasingly important through years of government funding cuts to education. Once again, national priorities and financial considerations coincided. The underpinning value proposition Australia offered to international students was high-quality education in English at relatively low prices, within the Asia-Pacific region and in a safe environment.

This experience provides a solid base on which Australian institutions are able to build. We have a fine reputation as an international provider of quality education. We have built a large, diverse international student base. We have strong links in the region. UNSW, in particular, has focused on building research partnerships throughout Asia. But we, together with other providers of higher education, face significant challenges.

### **Challenges**

Those challenges are both operational and strategic. Operationally, we are experiencing a significant lift in competitive intensity, particularly from US and UK universities. This is driven by both their desire and need for foreign student diversity and income. The sharp revaluation of the Australian dollar has also been a problem for us as has its volatility. Year-

to-year fluctuations of the Australian dollar's value versus the US dollar have often exceeded 20%.

The operational response to these developments has been the need to improve marketing and the conversion of offers to enrolments. While Australian universities have generally been effective marketers, the more competitive environment has caused us to look hard for improvements. Speeding up response times to applications, simplifying the communication to students, refining our messages, adopting a welcoming rather than 'you are lucky to get an offer' tone and using technology, social and alumni networks to strengthen links with prospect students are just some of the improvements under way.

The strategic challenges we face are fourfold:

**1. How can we adapt our offerings to produce not just educated professionals, but “global citizens” able to work and live in a wide range of countries?**

Currently the main mechanism for developing a global perspective is student exchange, either for one or two semesters or as is increasingly the case, for short courses abroad. But there are limits to this approach. Relatively few students can take advantage of a travel opportunity given the logistical support and costs involved. At UNSW in 2011 a total of 1,900 international students were on student exchange programs to Australia and only 1,300 Australian students (approximately 3%) were on exchange overseas. While we are rapidly increasing our capacity by negotiating exchange partnerships with leading universities around the world, language has been a barrier to promoting exchanges to non-English speaking countries. Another problem with the travel approach is that the experience and curriculum is more often a continuation of an existing course in another environment rather than an education that develops global citizenship. We need to find ways to expose more of our students to global issues, and do this in a way that develops the competencies and attributes of global citizenship.

**2. How might technology change what we teach and how we deliver courses?**

The U211 has introduced a multi-university “Global Issues Program” where students work with each other online and across national borders. At UNSW's Australian School of Business, students are learning how to manage virtual teams with team members located in a number of countries.

1 A consortium of 24 research-intensive international universities of which UNSW is a founding member.

**3. How can we work more effectively with universities in the region?**

When Australia started to recruit overseas students in large numbers the options for these students in their home countries were limited. We can no longer rely on simply being an alternative to local Asian institutions, which are moving ahead rapidly in terms of quality and capacity.

Our focus is shifting and we are now introducing a broad spectrum of partnerships to encourage student mobility, including joint degrees, dual degrees and twinning programs with selected partners in the region. Hopefully this will encourage student mobility in both directions—we need to persuade domestic students to consider international study options, particularly in Asia, to help redress the current imbalance in student traffic.

#### **4. How should the education offering into Asia in particular be positioned and marketed?**

The positioning for Australia has been good value, close to Asia, English language and safe. This position is becoming less relevant given the high Australian dollar and the students' desire for a total experience, often including work and accredited professional qualifications.

In my view, the strategic issues are more exciting in terms of potential, but also more threatening.

In the balance of this paper I will focus on what I see as the key response—developing global citizens.

#### **Developing global citizens**

Before addressing this issue, the meaning of “global citizen” needs to be clarified. Twenty-five years ago E.D. Hirsch published *“Cultural Literacy, What Every American Needs to Know”*. His point was that to be a functioning member of a democracy, people need a reasonable understanding of its history, international relationships, values, literature and culture.

The parallel for global literacy may be less an emphasis on what students know, but more an emphasis on what issues and differences might be and on how to discover and deal with them. A “global citizen” needs to be able to live and work effectively in different cultures. Hence, a basic knowledge and appreciation of the range of ideas, ideologies, religions, values and customs is required. How do people in different countries approach risk and money issues? Is communication direct or indirect—does “maybe” mean “maybe” or “no”? When is it okay to be informal and when is formality expected? I recall when once using my rudimentary German I said “du” (the familiar) when “zie” (the formal) was required and the listener winced, and then smiled.

Travel goes part of the way to developing this understanding, but in a somewhat haphazard fashion, with likely significant gaps in learning.

Once we have a clear idea of the knowledge, skills and attributes of global citizenship we can deploy our powerful arsenal of curriculum, on-campus and IT-enabled team work, and social and sporting activities.

In 2009 the UNSW Academic Board agreed that a course classified as “global education” had to focus on one or more countries or regions beyond Australia. The Board suggested a

number of course themes, including interdependence, social justice, human rights, sustainable futures, languages and cultural diversity.

We also have a great opportunity to use the diversity of nationalities on campus to this end. On Australian campuses it is not unusual to have more than 100 nationalities studying together. At UNSW we have some 14,000 students from between 120 and 130 countries out of a total of about 52,000 students.

Having such a diverse student mix doesn't automatically internationalise a university: diversity on campus does not necessarily translate into diversity of experience and learning. We have all seen international students tending to stay within their own language groups and an evident divide between local students and "the rest."

To fully realise the benefits of an internationalised campus we need to break down barriers that too often divide our international and domestic students. One opportunity lies with student organisations, which are often, understandably, dominated by domestic students, with international students active in separate country, cultural or religious societies—and little social interaction across the groups. In a recent meeting with student leaders I floated the idea of a "representative" percentage; that is, that one in four or five student leadership positions be filled by international students, representing the true make up of the university and forging active, decision- making links.

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Great universities have always been international in perspective, particularly in research. Knowledge transcends boundaries, and recognition of one's contribution by international peers is highly esteemed. The challenge now is to take this global attitude to knowledge and discovery into learning and teaching and the entire student experience.