



RMIT University response to
Draft International Education
and Skills Strategic Framework



Summary

- RMIT supports moves to strengthen the quality and integrity of Australia's higher education sector.
- RMIT advocates for the importance of transnational education and the valuable contribution it makes locally, regionally and internationally.
- RMIT urges well-balanced policy decisions with implementation plans that prioritise the experience of prospective international students and maintain Australia's brand as a high-quality destination for international education.



International education is multi-faceted

RMIT is Australia's largest dual-sector educational institution, providing pathways for lifelong learners between and across higher education and vocational education.

At RMIT our high integrity international education takes many forms. We welcome international students to our Melbourne campuses as part of our broad range of offerings, from English language pathways, through to Vocational Education, Higher Education and Postgraduate programs.

We also provide transnational education through partners in their home countries, collaborate with outstanding offshore providers on dual degrees with study split between each partner country, and offer international study abroad programs.

Locally, our international students are a vital part of the RMIT community and enthusiastic participants in Melbourne life. They are cross-cultural ambassadors, bringing a wealth of global knowledge and history to the classroom, to campus life and through the relationships that remain well beyond graduation.

Because of our alumni, our partners and our deep connections in many countries across the region, we connect with government, industry, alumni, experts and academics, to solve real world problems with social and economic benefit to Australia, the region and the world.





International education plays a vital role in the region

RMIT has a strong focus on our contribution in the Asia Pacific region, with campuses in Vietnam and deep and enduring partnerships with education institutions in Singapore, China, India and Indonesia.

Our broader region is going to need millions of skilled, knowledgeable people in the next two decades to grow equitable prosperity and provide care in communities.

Moreover, as a region, our prosperity is linked to that of our neighbours, and progress is intrinsically linked to education and the opportunity that comes with it.

Building relationships and partnerships, and working across disciplines and locations, is how we progress local, national and regional priorities.

Southeast Asia is projected to become the world's fourth-largest economy by 2040, with a forecast compound average growth rate of 4% in that period. This large and growing population will demand education, workforce training and support for digital transformation.

Australia's contribution to this demand is pivotal to our relationships across the region and to ensuring its growth story is one of success and shared prosperity. This is why we must be mindful that, in some instances, the knowledge and skills a student may wish to acquire to take back to their home country, might vary from those in demand in Australia.

The perception of a cap and limitations to entry into Australia risks our reputation and in turn Australia's soft power. It is likely that some students who are unable to study in their preferred destination within Australia, will choose another country altogether.

Protecting and sustainably growing our sector for the long-term

Integrity is fundamental to the success of Australia's higher education sector and RMIT supports changes to strengthen this. Unscrupulous providers and agents risk the excellent reputation of our sector, both locally and internationally, along with the futures of numerous hopeful students.

RMIT fully supports the government's commitment to removing these organisations, including new protections to prevent student poaching including doubling the length of no-transfer periods.

We advocate for market-driven managed growth, aligned to the University Accord compact, and without the introduction of prescriptive caps that mandate the location or programs an international student may choose to study in Australia. High quality, publicly-funded institutions with large domestic cohorts need to be appropriately consulted and considered by policy makers.

Many universities, including RMIT, have not yet returned to pre-pandemic international student numbers, and remain on a critical path to reduce deficits and restore financial sustainability. The nature of the proposed restrictions may cause significant damage to the viability of these important education institutions.

International students are a diverse group

International students are as diverse as the education offerings they choose to pursue. For example, a significant shift over the last four years means that RMIT now welcomes more students from India and the subcontinent than from China – and these student groups are distinctly different, in both their short-term and long-term preferences.

Not all international students seek work rights or aspire to migrate to Australia. Many international students study at Australian universities with the explicit purpose of gaining the knowledge and skills in greatest demand in their home countries – to which they intend to return and contribute.

We need to consider the knowledge and skills these different cohorts seek to acquire, which may differ from those in demand within Australia. Because of this RMIT recommends against aligning the choice of courses for international students purely on the basis of Australia's skills needs.

It requires a long-term and measured approach to this challenge, which will balance the desire to reduce immigration, with the broader value and benefits that international students bring to Australian cities and regions in furthering our culture, diversity, and economy.

Australia's classrooms, communities and industries of all kinds are enriched by students from a range of countries and experiences.



Considerations

Provider capacity should ensure international student success

International student welfare should sit at the centre of the proposed Framework and RMIT encourages a co-designed approach with government and the education sector.

The size of each provider's international student cohort should be considered against the provider's capacity to ensure students have a positive and safe experience in Australia.

Duty of care should extend beyond academic support, to include mental wellbeing and welfare support, as well as career and employability offerings, industry engagement opportunities and social connection.

Potential settings should be carefully balanced

Potential settings for international student enrolments could include: existing cohort size; the proportion of an individual provider's onshore international student cohort relative to its domestic enrolment; a more equal share of international students across the sector; and the location of enrolments.

However, RMIT recommends that the following cohorts be excluded from the cap:

- postgraduate research students;
- short and non-award courses (including Study Abroad);
- non-packaged short English language programs;
- sponsored students (including any cohort where their home government sponsor their students);
- articulation (study pathways) partnerships;
- dual degree arrangements; and
- student transfers from branch campuses (such as RMIT Vietnam).

Implementation should be measured to protect Australia's reputation

This is essential to maintain Australia's reputation and brand during the transition process and avoid loss of international student enrolments to other countries due to lack of certainty.

Recruitment of international onshore students for Semester 1 2025 is already well underway and universities typically work on an 18-month pipeline for this cohort.

RMIT urges a whole-of-government approach to implementation in close partnership with the sector, along with clear communication and staged implementation.

Visa risk ratings should be frozen to avoid cumulative negative impact

To limit risk (financial, reputational and student experience) arising from recent changes to the processing of student visa applications, RMIT advocates for the freezing of visa risk ratings.

This would allow the sector to focus on transitioning to implement the proposed legislation and not drive further uncertainty and distress for prospective students.

Accommodation pressures should be carefully analysed

In RMIT's experience, international students make diverse housing choices – some stay in purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) while others live with family or friends. Further analysis is necessary to inform and shape policy.

Linking international student enrolment growth with increased supply of student housing may not produce intended outcomes. Market dynamics including investor confidence, land access, workforce availability, and increased supply costs may all contribute to shortfalls in new accommodation. Consideration should be

given to financial guarantees or underwriting of new PBSAs to address perceived shortfalls.

Importantly, policy settings must avoid scenarios where accommodation does not meet diverse student needs or where expediency in increasing student accommodation diverts resources away from pursuing alternative models of affordable housing across society.

Contribution to critical policy solutions should also count as a contribution to government's housing effort and be factored into any cap. For example, RMIT plays an integral role in supplying skills critical to the construction workforce required to meet our nation's National Housing Accord.

Lead times to expand transnational education should be recognised

Transnational education is one of Australia's most significant exports and further opportunity exists. However, it is not an immediate solution to fill revenue shortfalls created by international student caps.

Transnational education partnerships require long lead times, careful management, common understanding and well-developed relationships.

For example, RMIT has 13,000 Higher Education students enrolled with RMIT Vietnam, a foreign branch campus, and an additional 4,200 enrolled through an offshore delivery partnership with the Singapore Institute of Management. This success is the outcome of 24 years in Vietnam and 37 years in Singapore.

RMIT welcomes the opportunity to share its experience with government, the education sector and industry in order to further employment focused and skills-based programs.



Celebrating our diverse and talented international students

Contributing to Australia's research capabilities



Paula Petrini comes from a modest background in Brazil. She moved to Australia amidst COVID-19 after receiving a scholarship to complete an internship at RMIT. She recently completed her PhD studies and graduated in May. Her research is focused on the process of thermal energy moving from one object or substance to another due to a temperature difference between them.

[Link to student story](#)



Le Anh is originally from China and had worked in the IT industry in China and the USA before commencing her PhD studies in Australia when her son had just started primary school. Her PhD thesis looks at using digital simulation games to develop employability capabilities.

[Link to student story](#)

Creating pathways to new opportunities



Samim Sultani arrived in Australia as a refugee from Afghanistan. He's completed the Certificate IV in Education Support and Diploma of Teacher Education Preparation, graduating at the end of 2023. He was the recent recipient of the VE Student of the Year. Samim plans to continue studying in 2025 for his Bachelor of Education.

[Link to student story](#)

International mobility



Sven Hüttermann originally visited RMIT as an exchange student from Germany as part of our international student exchange program. While undertaking a study abroad semester in his undergraduate degree in Geomatics, not only did he meet teachers and professors who would later become supervisors for his PhD at RMIT, he also met his Australian wife.

[Link to student story](#)

Connecting our university communities



Suzee Ngo, an international student from Vietnam, recently completed her internship with RMIT Communications in Melbourne. She started her Bachelor of Professional Communications at RMIT Vietnam, then applied to transfer her studies to the RMIT Melbourne campus making wonderful connection and a big contribution.

[Link to student story](#)

CRICOS Provider No: 00122A

June 2024

