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The Marketing of Regional Australia: Strategies to increase the numbers of international students studying outside capital cities

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1.0 Introduction:

Australia's present international education market position is narrow and somewhat vulnerable. 65% of international students reside in either Sydney or Melbourne. Most international students participate in the university undergraduate programs, or the Vocational Education and Training (VET) or English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) sectors. These international students are heavily concentrated in business-related and information technology courses (Nelson, 2003).

In 2003, Australia experienced a 16.5% increase in the number of overseas college students (to approximately 167,000). Selected markets grew rapidly. The Chinese market grew by 20% to approximately 32,000 students. Large growth in markets from India (27% increase) and South Korea (19% increase) was also experienced (Bollag, 2004). The strong growth in the Australian international student population has been driven by tighter American visa restrictions since the terrorist attack on the US of September 11, 2001. Recently, U.S. universities have been suffering steep declines in international student applications, especially in the 'sciences' areas (CNN, 2004). However, Australia has maintained a steady, strong annual growth in overseas student numbers over the past 15 years, and this trend is expected to continue, maintaining at least a 15 to 20% pa annual growth in the near future (Schroff, 2003). A 2002 IPD Education Australia analysis places education as the third largest service industry after tourism and transportation. IDP Education Australia's 2004 marketing and research report, lists Australia as the third most popular educational choice by international students (after the USA and the UK). The Australian Bureau of Statistics currently values this educational services industry at around \$4.12B (AUD) per annum. It is also Australia's eighth largest export earner.

'The world is at a turning-point in the internationalisation of education and training. With population increases and rising incomes, participation in education and training is expected to accelerate' (Nelson, 2003). Education and training remain essential contributors to driving world development. The IDP Education Australia's 2004 advertising report predicts that by 2025 Australia's international education student numbers will have experienced a net ninefold increase (from its onshore and offshore operations).

The growth in the Australian secondary school international student market has not mirrored that of the Australian universities, but recent growth trends have been similar. In 2004 the IDP Education Australia marketing and research report and schools facts sheet, indicated the Australian universities sector had grown by 10.2%, and that the schools sector had also grown by over 15%. Education Queensland International reports it expects growth rates above 20% for 2004. The secondary education international student market positioning requires an additional extraordinary and special approach.

1.1 Marketing:

Australian secondary school international student educators can capture increased numbers of international students through the uniqueness of respective, regional, niche markets. Differentiated course approaches; targeted high level learning environments; specific regional

advantages; safe, secure, friendly, community supported approaches may be adopted in targeted regional destinations of Australia. These strategic advantages must focus on a 'whole-of-government' approach to frame and develop long-term positioning strategies. Such strategies, identify key elements of the Federal Government's international education policy framework – 'quality' and 'diversity', and can deliver great benefits for regional Australia. In addition, these initiatives showcase Australia's regional capabilities to the world, broaden Australia's international appeal, and deliver expanded educational offerings.

Marketing international education in regional Australia requires decisions concerning the location of the offering – a city or a region, the quality of the schools and their programs, the connectivity or direct links to home and the social acceptance of the international student (Alloway & Gilbert, 2001; James, et al., 1999; Kenyon et al., 2001). However, attitudinal and aspirational effects may sometimes deliver equally influential effectors (Marks et al., 2000). In addition, lower rural educational standards, and less competition between schools can also influence international students' decision making (Kenyon, et al., 2001). Thus a regional Australian community must promote itself vigorously as a differentiated, dynamic, vibrant, total education solutions provider. Research in this area has been minimal, and this paper provides an insight into the mechanisms and strategies needed to deliver such solutions in regional Australia.

Students from countries such as Brunei and Australia are well versed in their understanding of education and educational options (and from a worldly perspective) (Fien et al, 2002). Indeed, students in many overseas countries are increasingly aware of global education choices. Recognising this maturity of the overseas client base has become a significant imperative.

Universities have developed competitive marketing divisions, and have become significantly more astute in positioning themselves in the world marketplace. For example, overseas students may be targeted by biasing promotional appeal towards gender specific preferences (Unterhalter et al, 2003), and by promoting the four most important determinants of university preference selection - course suitability, academic reputation, job prospects and teaching quality (Soutar & Turner, 2002). For instance, institutions looking for quality students in reading-focused subjects, may preferentially target female students (Hoffman, 2002).

At the secondary school level, international students tend to mirror their university counterparts. They prefer schools:

- 1) with strong academic reputations;
- 2) offering very good teaching quality;
- 3) where the course of their choice is a real option, with a clearly recognised study pathway;
- 4) that offer a prospect of a good job,
- 5) with a stimulating educational campus life.

Hence, they tend to select schools with a definite view to the future, and articulated, convenient university pathways.

Throughout the Australian international education framework, providers need to remain focused, and not be driven by the economic imperative of the revenue stream, but rather be the drivers of educational reforms (Pickering, 2001). Creative ideas - like Professor Messel's 'International Science Schools' should be developed. The 'International Science Schools' program brings together top students from throughout Australia. They then work with 'expert' lecturers in cutting-edge learning situations (Australian Science Teachers' Journal, 2003). Such a model could be developed for other areas of education - for example, a bio-tech/business focused project along with the strategies for implementation or commercialisation.

1.2 Marketing Regional Australia:

Searle (1996) identified a number of criteria for Australian cities to develop as globally appealing cities. His dimensions list detailed:

- 1) good access to an international airport;
- 2) proximity to a business centre;

- 3) good public transport;
- 4) high quality of life;
- 5) cultural facilities;
- 6) good access to tertiary education;
- 7) good access to health facilities;
- 8) a range of attractive housing options;
- 9) high quality heritage buildings that distinguish the city from others;
- 10) attractive environment;
- 11) efficient infrastructure;
- 12) effective government;
- 13) safe city.

The unknown or 'x' factor between these dimensions remains the synergy that exists, and drives, a dynamic interaction between cultural and economic innovation.

Lepani (1999) suggested that because of their small size regional Australian cities should focus on maximizing both specialization and economic diversification, developing linkages and relationships across their value chain, whilst reorganizing competitive advantage factors that may be used to continually promote the region.

Lepani et al. (1993) provided a series of foci to deliver economic viability – including: a focus on airports; clean, fast transport; information highways; excellent education; and high quality research. Other foci described include:

- 1) the building of flexible, responsive systems to incorporate new initiatives;
- 2) the development of collaborative participation between customers, suppliers, all levels of education providers, government, private providers and the like; and
- 3) the development and utilization of a rich variety of multiculturalism; and the delivering of unique combinations of localism and globalism.

When the schools sector is considered, regional Australia should develop unique international student marketing strategies. These strategies need to reflect specific and identifiable aspects of that destination - those that offer appeal to particular overseas markets. For example, the Great Barrier Reef is a specific attraction that has appeal to sectors of the European market, whilst others from Asia may prefer a total education pathways package – ELICOS, schools, VET and university, combined with a family based accommodation package. Such mixes, embedded in a personalised approach, blended with high quality targeted educational offerings can influence an International student and their family to opt for a regional educational venue.

By 2025 a ninefold increase in international students is predicted for Australian educational institutions, however the schools sector is predicted to display a 2 to 3 fold increase. Australian capital cities are approaching international student educational capacity (Bohm et al., 2002). Hence, there remains a real capacity to increase the number of international students studying in regional areas, and smaller capital cities. Wider marketing of well-planned regional programs and packages may raise international student market awareness of such exciting regional opportunities, deliver additional choice and ensure the overall Australian educational product is driven to higher standards of quality (and excellence).

Schools in regional Australia must work collaboratively in their regional area to pursue differentiation strategies from their capital city counterparts, and deliver stimulating learning options. Many Institutions, like the Leysin American School (LAS) - a US based international university-preparatory high school, deliver high quality international programs at the school level. Institutions like LAS often concentrate on: language mastery; academic excellence; a stable, caring balanced learning environment; developing responsible citizens who can think creatively, reason critically, and communicate effectively; motivating and inspiring all students. They build their operation around efficient management and continuous improvement models that respect peoples of other cultures (LAS, 2004a). Regional Australian schools should seek to capture this model but also diversify, adding new dimensions to the educational experience – dimensions that are unique to this country and capture the appeal of the region.

Both the Australian and the Queensland Governments have policies that encourage diversification of educational products. Some of these include:

- 1) widening the mix of overseas students by recruiting more intensely from Europe and the Americas (while continuing growth in Asia);
- 2) extending international students' fields of study beyond Business and Information Technology;
- 3) attracting more international students to the schools sector (Nelson, 2003).

Local, destination-specific solutions may be developed that deliver new diversification options for international students and regional education. The application of these governmental policies delivered through regionally focused strategies - such as those applied in the Cairns region, may offer a mechanism to deliver real growth in international student numbers in regional areas, and especially in appropriately located smaller regional cities. The broadening of the marketing framework beyond state capital cities to include strategic regional programs is likely to, in time, raise the international students' awareness of the range of Australian educational opportunities, thereby broadening their perspectives and influencing their choice of destination (AEI, 2003).

The Cairns Region of Australia has developed a unique, and highly innovative model to win international students. This model, the Regional International Education Model has been trialled across 31 regional primary and secondary schools throughout 2003 and 2004. This model encapsulates the latest educational and marketing initiatives and is regionally focused. It is now in its early stages of delivering international students and study tours outlined in the three year, Cairns Region Strategic Business Plan.

2.0 The Regional International Education Model:

2.1 History of International Education in the Cairns Region:

The World Competitiveness Yearbook (Garelli, 2003) rates Australia number one (95%) for its quality of life, and number one (95.7%) as a safe, politically stable destination. Cairns has been voted Australia's most liveable city. The Cairns region of Northern Australia is a vibrant, expanding, economically diverse area representing over 240,000 people. In 2003 this region had a GRP of \$6.2B AUD. Cairns has the 5th busiest international airport in Australia – with over 3.4 million passenger movements in 2004 (Cairns Port Authority, 2004). It has a substantial seaport that caters for international cruise-liners; a regional naval base (and nine vessels); numerous tourist marine adventures vessels; and a large fishing fleet.

Educationally, over the past decade, the ELICOS sector has experienced strong growth in international student numbers. Non-government High Schools have maintained significant international enrolments, especially from Papua New Guinea and Japan. Government schools are also involved in the international student market. Cairns State High School has participated in this international market for approximately 10 years, drawing International student from countries including Japan, Germany, Brazil, United Kingdom, Thailand, Philippines, USA, Scandinavia, China and Italy. Two additional government high schools - Smithfield and Trinity Bay State High Schools have now joined this program, each with three year marketing plans targeting approximately 50 international students. The regional institutions - James Cook University, and Tropical North Queensland (TNQ) TAFE, provide English Language Centres for international students, and continue to build their international student and marketing infrastructure. Cairns remains a very popular destination for Japanese school study tour visits. Schools from Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea are other study tour participants. To capture more of the International student market, and drive the region as an educational centre of choice, a new model was devised.

2.2 The Cairns Region's Strategic Reference Group:

In October 2002, the North Queensland (NQ) office of EQI was established to operationalise the Queensland State Government's agenda of growing the international student market in NQ.

A cross-sectoral approach was adopted. The community was asked to develop a framework. To coordinate views and develop strategies a 'Regional Strategic Reference Group' was established.

The Strategic Reference Group has a 'whole-of-government', 'whole-of-community', positive, proactive, energetic, approach. Its participant framework is displayed in Figure 1. It is operating dynamically, and has drawn the region together in a cohesive, productive and focused manner. Those in positions of regional power, for instance: the Pro Vice Chancellor of JCU, The TNQ TAFE Director of Business, the Regional Executive Director Schools, The Executive Officer of the Chamber of Commerce, the Chief Executive Officer of Advance Cairns, key school Principals, Senior Officers of Regional State Government Departments, and the Queensland General Manager of EQI, are members of this dynamic group.

The Regional Strategic Reference Group develops and drives latest regional strategies to develop Cairns as an international education destination of choice. Schools are:

- 1) collaborating;
- 2) developing high levels of excellence;
- 3) differentiating their products;
- 4) chasing international accreditation;
- 5) cross promoting their competitors' skills.

Higher and Vocational Education participants are assisting with:

- 1) pathways developments;
- 2) subject credits;
- 3) cross-sector joint planning;
- 4) secondary schools' marketing;
- 5) fast-track transitions.

EQI has funded a manager's position. The Premier's Department of the State Government through Queensland Education and Training International (QETI), the local tourism industry and local businesses have funded cross-sectoral education agents' visits promoting the region, and driving new networks for the region. The Cairns City Council, Advance Cairns, and the Cairns Chamber of Commerce are promoting regional education initiatives into Hong Kong, China, Guam, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. These peak bodies are driving a united regional international agenda for education across all sectors.

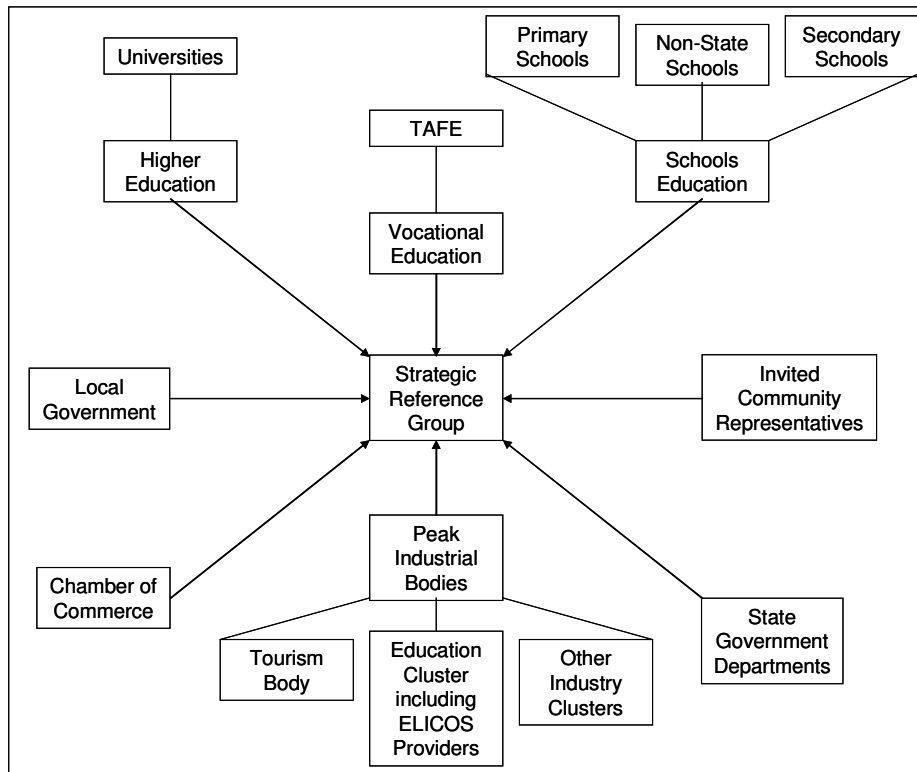


Figure 1 The Strategic Reference Group Model © Forbes & Hamilton, 2004

Attracting international students at secondary or high school level provides schools with additional revenue. It creates an additional pipeline of international students into the vocational and higher education sectors. In the case of government schools the region captures 28% of

international student visits to Queensland, and generates 15% of the study tours revenue for Queensland. International education generates considerable economic benefits to the region (tuition fees, accommodation, living, entertainment, tours, family visits, multiplier effects), with the schools sector alone estimated to be worth over \$5 M to the region during 2004.

2.3 The Importance of a Management Structure:

Regional coordination requires high-level, strategic managerial and educational expertise. Managerial selection must be carefully delivered. The manager must be highly skilled, with an excellent understanding of education, management and interpersonal relationships. This person must develop and deliver productive, quality partnerships across all sectors in the region. Many disparate groups must be drawn into a sharing, cooperative relationship that pursues benefits for all members of the educational and wider community.

The Manager must work closely with all groups, negotiate, generate reports and communiqués, work with educational agents in a sharing, cross-sectorial manner, market and promote the region, ensure schools deliver quality assurance criteria and standards and achieve the objectives and targets of the regionally-set, strategic business plan, on-time and in-budget.

Key roles of the Regional Manager are displayed in Figure 2. The Regional International Education Manager must be a visionary, capable of setting and driving micro and macro agendas. For example, how can a school differentiate itself from another?

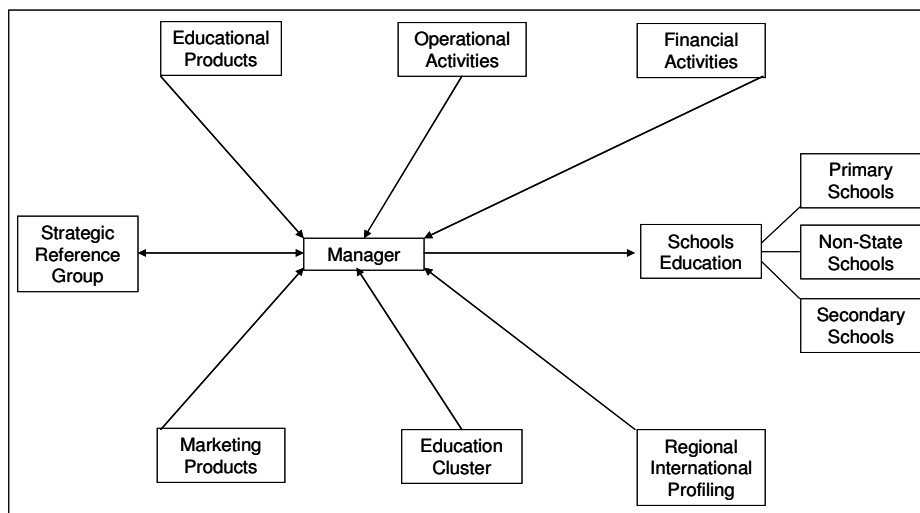


Figure 2 The International Education Regional Strategic Manager Model © Forbes & Hamilton, 2004

2.4 The Regional Marketing Strategies Approach:

It remains difficult to win students to regional Australia. Hence, a carefully developed targeted market approach was adopted. Markets displaying preferences for quality of life, education, tropical climate, safety, and outdoor activities were pursued. Australian universities experiences in strategic markets were also considered. An international education regional strategic marketing approach was developed. This marketing model is displayed in Figure 3.

The Cairns Region selected China, Japan, Brazil, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Germany and Korea as a focus for its international education marketing. With the exception of Brazil this typifies key market leaders as outlined by IDP. Brazil was selected because of the special nature of Brazilian students, who enjoy the outdoor life, sunshine and working in a relaxing environment. Key agents within these localities were sourced, and contacted. Visits to Hong Kong, China, Japan, Korea and Guam were undertaken to enhance relationships, and offshore education agent delegations from China, Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Mexico, Brazil, Germany and others were received. Extensive international networks were established and promoted.

Research from key Australian bodies including EQI, Australian Education International (AEI), IDP (Australia), Queensland's Department of State Development, QETI and Study Cairns was sourced. National, State and Regional marketing strategies were developed, and modified as new initiatives arose.

A regional marketing strategy was developed with EQI's General Manager and Marketing Manager. The EQI marketing/sales team provided quality marketing feedback to the region regarding their planned promotional activities and delivered strategies.

QETI funding was obtained for a Cairns education showcase – participating education agents met with representatives from Cairns international education providers. A promotional brochure for the International Student Program (ISP) schools, TAFE, the University and EQI was developed and circulated globally to promote the region. In conjunction with the 'whole-of-region' strategy, the Regional Manager became the focal point to 'sell' Cairns educational products. New products for the schools sector were developed.

New 'whole-of-region' marketing briefs and promotional information were developed and incorporated into on-line and regional publications for peak regional bodies like Advance Cairns, the Cairns Chamber of Commerce, Study Cairns, the Cairns City Council, Tourism Tropical North Queensland, and others. Schools' promotional packs were developed and forwarded to targeted potential ISP students, education agents and others. Innovative education curriculum products were promoted to deliver international projects and consultancies in the region. QETI / State Development Export Planning and Preparation Workshops were developed collaboratively for the schools sector.

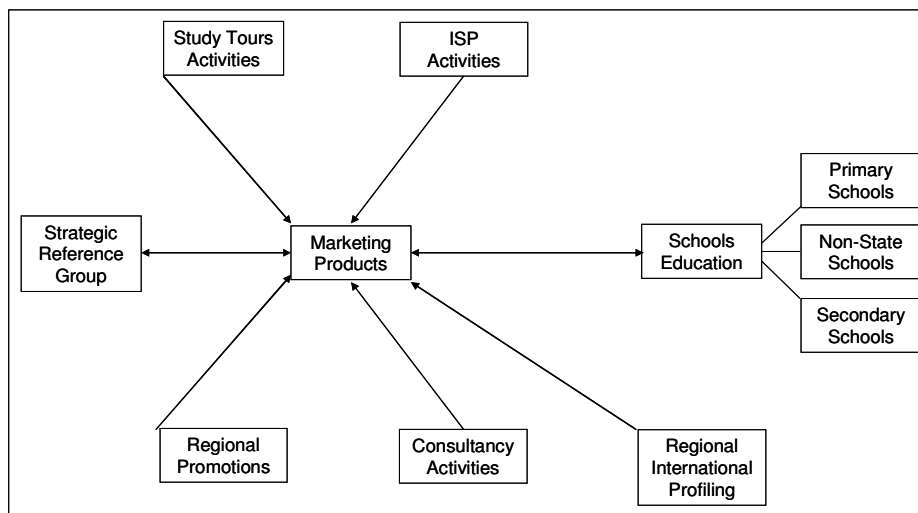


Figure 3 The International Education Regional Strategic Marketing Approach © Forbes & Hamilton, 2004

This collaborative approach reduced the negativity created by competition and delivered a highly streamlined, cohesive approach to winning a larger international market. The region and education agents have found this a successful model – dealing with one centralised point. The matching of agent requirements to regional education and business solutions has delivered increased market share, especially in the schools and ELICOS sectors.

Marketing remains the key driver of the success of this program and a united, team-based, collegiate approach delivers successful outcomes for all (students, schools, agents, English Language Colleges, vocational and university institutions, government, industry, and the region).

A macro strategy (encompassing five strategies) now delivers a unique Cairns solution. These strategies – macro marketing, study tours, ISP, education packages, offshore programs and other marketing packages are being developed conjointly with other regional projects. These are delivering, and will continue to grow and further deliver, high economic yields for the region's participants. Macro marketing has delivered cross-sectoral benefits, new contacts and new markets, free exchanges of ideas, and regionally focussed solutions independent from southern controls. Revenue from study tours has reached \$350,000 (120% growth) in 2004,

from ISP activities \$110,000 (90% growth). These will continue to grow. From 2005 onwards, other products will come on-line, and by 2007 the Cairns region is projected to generate in excess of \$1,600,000. Applying the Region's educational economic multiplier (Cummins Report, 2003), a direct economic benefit of \$4.8M is projected.

2.5 The Cairns Regions' Strategic Educational Strategies:

The regions' educational strategies are summarised in Figure 4. The region is well known internationally as a top tourist destination. Tourism Tropical North Queensland (2003) reported that Cairns was second only to Sydney as the top international tourist destination in Australia. Daily flights from Japan have also helped boost both the daily tourist visitor numbers to Cairns, and the demand for study tour visits to the Cairns schools sector.

Study tours range from half-day to full-day visits, and some may extend for several weeks and include 'homestay' accommodation. Visiting students may participate in a range of activities including: 'homestay' and farmstay accommodation; schools visits; English Language classes; 'buddy' programs in local schools (with age appropriate student peers); excursions to popular tourist destinations; and special activities that showcase the local culture (for example, bar-b-ques, camp fires, indigenous cultural concerts, and the like). This educational market continues to grow, with large Japanese student groups (up to 350 students per group) regularly visiting North Queensland on 96 hour school excursions. School excursion groups typically require half-day and full-day school visits, including the popular 'buddy' experience, and participation in local classroom activities. EQI has accredited 31 Cairns schools to host specialist study tours. This process ensures the Accredited Officers in each host school, are trained to deliver quality study tour programs for all visiting international students.

Regionally-based full-time international students, and their agents, now recognise the quality of the schools in the region, and are beginning to promote the region's worth. In the industry, 'word-of-mouth' recommendations are powerful marketing tools. One government high school has successfully completed the 'Preliminary Study for International Schools Accreditation', and the whole school community is working on the school's 'Self Study Report for International Accreditation' with the Council of International Schools Australia. Cairns State High School will be one of four government schools in Queensland with this high level international recognition. This school has the top youth orchestra in Queensland. It has a proud history of academic excellence, a impressive alumni, an outstanding Performing Arts Department, and an innovative senior school program. Students may compliment their academic studies with work experience, industry qualifications (for example, the Padi Dive Certificate), Vocational Education and Training and subject specific extension tutorials.

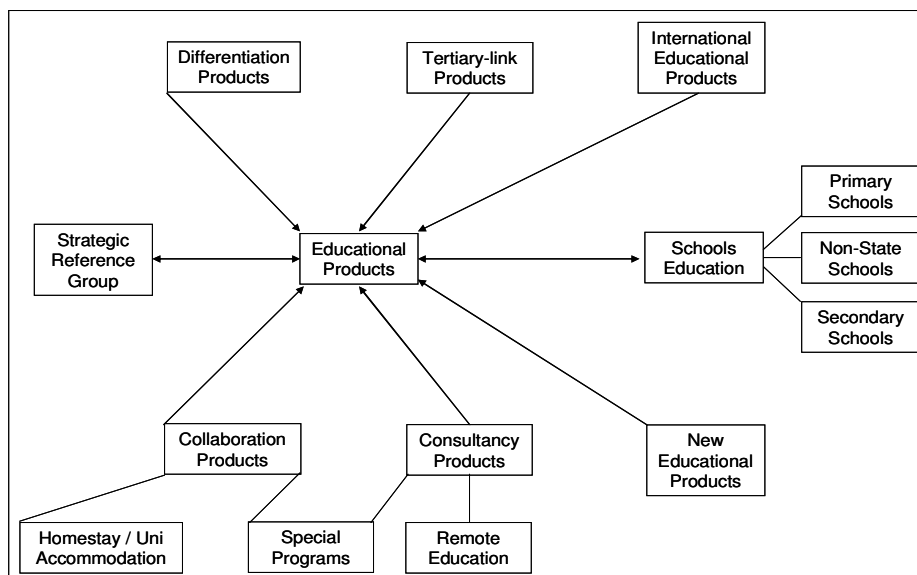


Figure 4 The International Education Regional Strategic Educational Products Model © Forbes & Hamilton, 2004

Two additional schools have joined the Cairns International Student Program, and have differentiated both their educational programs and their products. Trinity Bay State High School delivers outstanding science programs and their bi-yearly 'Science Expo' has won Queensland Government's Showcase Awards for Excellence. The school partners with the Tropical North Queensland TAFE, and complements its senior studies programs with Vocational Education and Training offerings. Smithfield State High School is the Queensland Centre of Excellence for Maths, Science and Technology, offering robotics, multimedia, high-level programming, biomechanics, and the like. This school has special articulation agreements with the local university. Its high-performance students receive exemptions for some university subjects. Regional quality independent schools also differentiate themselves on religious grounds, on their academic performance, and on specialist programs like 'excellence in sport', or 'excellence in music'.

The sharing of information, resources and ideas has improved regional academic performances. In 2003, when measured against the Queensland-wide final-year high school assessment system, the region produced its best academic results. This is, in-part, due to the collegiate approach adopted by schools. These schools targeted delivering improved educational outcomes for each school, and especially those with an international program focus.

The Regional Manager promoted the education offerings of the region in Indonesia and Hong Kong. Peak local bodies did likewise in Guam, Hong Kong, China, Japan and Korea. The University and TNQ TAFE regularly promote the region during their off-shore visits. EQI's Marketing Team, in their offshore marketing programs, aggressively promoted the government schools sector. The region has actively promoted their educational products to the global marketplace building new links. Schools have developed self-promotional materials and many new educational initiatives – some innovations (biomechanics, HP-Microsoft PDA initiative, tertiary programs at high school, centres of excellence, on-line learning and research sharing) are underway. Areas still to be comprehensively developed include:

- 1) offshore programs where local schools partner with an offshore school to deliver the Queensland Year 10 curriculum for overseas students' articulation into senior studies in Cairns. Advance Cairns, Cairns City Council and EQI are pursuing this area;
- 2) international projects and consultancies where excellent programs developed and in use in Cairns are showcased to visiting professional groups. In some projects, aide and development is provided to overseas educational groups, seeking appropriate professional development and training.

2.6 Operationalising the Regional International Education Model:

The initial vehicle to operationalise Queensland State Government's agenda for growing the international student market across the regions was provided by EQI (in October 2002) and the local Government Schools District. There was an agreement to fund, and support, a managerial position for up to three years in North Queensland. The regional manager's task was to draw the disparate educational providers together under a united, vision setting regional approach. The Cairns Region's Strategic Reference Group developed the latest regional strategies appropriate to the building of an international education region of excellence in North Queensland. International education business plans for the region were developed, shared, logged and instigated.

International Student Program (ISP) targets for each school were shared. A differentiated school strategy was selected to maximize regional appeal. Because the tertiary sector is a key focus to international students when consider their choices of overseas study locality, University and TAFE offerings were heavily promoted to all schools aged international students. Agents were sourced and pursued to deliver study tours. This strategy spread the revenue base to a wider range of schools. It increased the interest in the 'whole-of-region' push for international education recognition, and it delivered new initiatives and options. A mix of study tours (Half-day and Full-day visits, EQ Model and TO Model) was achieved. The choice of study tour (size and duration) matching the regional schools' preference (cultural outcomes), capacity and

availability at the requested time of visit was delivered. Three schools are jointly pursuing the establishment of an offshore program.

EQI's International Project Team have collaborated with schools and training organisations in the region, to provide curriculum development programs for the Lao Education Fellows Professional Group visit. This area remains a future regional focus. New 'value-add' differentiation products such as the tertiary certification in Multimedia, Radio Broadcasting Programs and Certification, Marine Studies with Padi Scuba Diving Certificate, and studies in Bio-Science have been developed by schools. IT / Business focused e-Learning programs are nearing completion. The use of local and specialist Education Queensland facilities such as EQ's Environmental Education Centres have been incorporated.

Quality assurance and articulation programs have been shared across the region with the tertiary sector recognising prior learning in areas such as Multimedia, IT, Journalism, Science and Business, and creating flexible senior studies options for excellent high school students.

ELICOS providers have expanded their capacity to absorb additional students in preparation for high school and tertiary courses. International students under 18 years of age are required to live in family (or 'homestay') environments. Specialist 'homestay' providers have emerged. They now recruit, evaluate and manage 'homestay' families, delivering quality assured Australian family living experiences for international students.

Agents' visits have been organised to promote the region as a destination of choice for international students. This has been achieved by effective, collaborative partnerships operating between the local tourism authority (Tourism Tropical North Queensland), State Government Departments (Premiers - QETI, State Development and EQI) and Education providers (JCU, TNQ TAFE, English Language Colleges and non-government and government schools). These visits have generated greater regional interest and higher levels of market intelligence. Sharing of Education Agents has meant that Agents now communicate cross-sectorially, knowing their information will be shared, and benefit their international student clients.

Funding and sustainable sources of venture capital remain a concern. At present, EQ, and the government schools pay the manager's salary, on-costs and other expenses. Ways to fund this area include – study tours, new products, sale of expertise (consultancies), and grants. Investment required to initiate such a program is approximately \$150,000 AUD per annum, and a three year Financial Plan outlined in a Strategic Regional Business Plan is required. The international market is a challenging one to capture, especially at the school level. Establishing credibility, ensuring quality and comparability, forging valuable relationship links, generating trust, differentiating products, and driving dynamic programs all take significant developmental time.

Major hurdles for regional Australia focus on overcoming traditional international educational approaches. In the past, international students have moved from their home city to a large overseas city. Outside capital cities, overseas knowledge of Australia, and its education systems, especially at the high school level, is limited. This situation may be addressed using a raft of approaches. For example the region may target:

- 1) raising agents' awareness (most education agents - usually based in cities, have a mind-set that traditionally targets city placement, not regional placement. Hence a regional education process for agents combined with excellent, open communication channels is essential.);
- 2) producing informative brochures, websites, and other marketing collateral (promoting the region);
- 3) publicising great achievements and successful pathways of past students (showcasing the educational and regional 'winners');
- 4) providing great regional contacts and response/feedback systems (delivering instantaneous, cooperative, collaborative communications);
- 5) gathering market intelligence, researching, and then targeting markets that, on-balance, offer the best chances of success (for example, the Cairns region targets wealthy areas seeking educational advancement, high-tech and science focused areas, sports focused areas, lifestyle areas and quality 'home family' support areas);

6) overcoming the reluctance of overseas families to send their high school aged students to Australia for their education (a safe, secure, quality destination with great future opportunities is required).

Many other support ideas like quality 'homestay' coordination, international student support meetings, structured social activities and guidance services complement the comfort zone for international students.

We now present our summary of the *Do's and Don'ts for establishing a credible, quality regional destination for international students*, and then add to this the special challenge of promoting the schools sector. We argue this sector is the most difficult to sell, but if delivered correctly it can be one that delivers great benefits and new revenue streams to the region and its community.

3.0 The Do's and Don'ts:

3.1 The Do's:

In developing internationally appealing education products that draw International students to regional Australian study destinations, in conjunction with the strategies and models above, the following 'do's' apply - **Do:**

1. focus on the future not the past and develop your own markets. Very little quantifiable statistical information exists relating to regional international education, so develop 'real' destination specific market intelligence, not 'hearsay' market unintelligence.
2. have an intimate understanding of the educational products to be offered in your region, and present these in an award winning salesperson's approach.
3. network extensively in your region and draw all players into a united support and participative infrastructure.
4. listen to regional marketing expertise and experience, and work with it, not against it! Have an energetic, enthusiastic and even more tenacious approach to marketing, and develop an accurate local database of your regions' statistics and the local trends.
5. actively seek out and build relationships with other Australian regional areas, and with selected regions of chosen overseas (country) markets.
6. develop relationships with agents and countries offering like-minded educational philosophies eg. school age students provided with:
 - a. greater care, stronger family, school and community relationships and experiences in a smaller city
 - b. higher exposure to English language leading to accelerated rate of English language acquisition, proficiency and learning - embedded in quality education programs
 - c. safer, friendlier environments
 - d. higher levels of personal tracking
 - e. opportunities to quickly develop closer relationships.
7. encourage exposure of your region to other countries in a range of differentiated ways (summer camps, study tours, teacher professional development visits, consultancies, Offshore Education Visits).
8. develop knowledge of educational pathways for students in Australia, not just in your region.
9. offer expertise in educational counselling for study pathways into top institutions.

3.2 The Don'ts:

The above strategies and models may be used to develop appealing international student focused education products for regional Australian study destinations. However the following 'don'ts' and associated relevant explanations apply. **Don't:**

1. import knowledge and just apply it.
2. react to empirical statistics, trends and patterns of market demand, but rather adopt a proactive approach.

3. listen to the platitudes of the past (past international marketing experience in Australia is limited largely to the successful marketing experiences of 'sandstone' universities in key large internationally profiled cities in Australia). These marketing experiences cannot be generalised / projected into marketing strategies for regional Australia. Regional Australia needs unique marketing strategies.
4. assume the limited market intelligence presents an accurate picture. The international education industry in regional Australia is an immature market. Market intelligence is influenced by
 - a. word-of-mouth (e.g., individual student experiences to date)
 - b. current perceptions of quality Australian education only being available in inner city Sydney and Melbourne
 - c. reactionary models.
5. assume that aggressive marketing will be a winner. Marketing should be inquisitive, flexible, intelligent and responsive to market demands.
6. make assumptions about a market (i.e. all students and families from certain markets will seize the opportunity of accelerated pathways to Australian Universities via Foundation Programs). Within a particular overseas country market there will parts of that market that will reject this model.
7. make generalisations from too few examples and limited marketing experience in the schools sector.
8. shape /develop your regional marketing strategy from:
 - a. marketing plans of the past
 - b. marketing experiences of the past
 - c. marketing knowledge of the past (for regional Australia, there is very little past experience in international education).
9. expect that overseas country markets have knowledge of and exposure to the relevant Australian destination. You need to build a regional recognition profile.
10. ignore the importance and value of location, time zones and closeness to the market with efficient flight connections.

4.0 Marketing Strategies (product, place, price, distribution):

A Greenfields approach has been adopted. The region has developed a model encompassing its own uniqueness and differentiated products. It views itself as a tropical paradise, encompassing the barrier reef, the wet tropics rainforest, enmeshed around Australia's hub for international tourism. It has a quality tertiary education sector; a farming and mining hub; an international airline hub. It has developed differentiated schools and a support infrastructure to accommodate the demands of international students, and their parents. It has embarked up a whole of region approach – and the region is selling international education!

5.0 The Future:

For international education there is scant relevant data for regional Australia, hence regional approaches to international education should look to the future. A strategic, well constructed, suitably funded and located 'Greenfields' approach based on the above model offers an avenue to success. The key is 'there is a market for regional Australia, but each region is different and will appeal to different markets – each region must determine and target its niche and its best international student customer base!' The Cairns Region has determined its international student market to be primarily in parts of Europe and Latin America, the USA, Southern China, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan, and is using the above model to deliver its strategies.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations:

Education and training is essential to driving world development. To take advantage of the Federal and State Government's policies - to showcase Australia's regional capabilities to the world, a strategies model should be adopted. The Cairns Region's 'Strategic Reference Group Model' offers one such pathway. Today, there remains considerable capacity for growth in selected regional areas, but the value of location, time zones, and closeness to the international market (via efficient flight connections) should not be overlooked. The wide ranging and highly creative marketing of unique, differentiated, well-targeted, regional programs (based on the

models above) offers a pathway to delivering international students. Such strategies raise international students' awareness of regional Australian educational opportunities. The likelihood of international students replacing their traditional Australian capital cities destinations with regional educational solutions can be enhanced, particularly in the regions offering a wide range of appeal – both educational and non-educational.

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