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Council for International Education
Department of Education and Training

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Go8 Submission to Growing International Education in Regional Australia

The Group of Eight (Go8) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into consultations around *Growing International Education in Regional Australia*. Please note that this submission represents the views of the Go8 network. Member universities may also make their own, more detailed submissions.

Summary of Recommendations:

Recommendation: The Go8 urges caution in the way that international students are discussed in the context of migration settings, due to the high level of risk of inadvertent messaging. The volatility of the international education market, coupled with increased activity from alternative destination countries, means that care must be taken with changes to policies and settings that could – even if only inadvertently – have an impact.

Recommendation: The Go8 supports the growth of international education in rural, regional and remote Australia. However, care must be taken to ensure this growth does not come at the expense of international student enrolments in metropolitan areas overall.

Recommendation: Policies designed to impact the behavior of international student must be found to bring national benefit that outweighs the risks to the critical areas of Australia's national prosperity: to the economy, to national security, to our place in the Indo-Pacific region and to our soft power capacity.

Recommendation: the Go8 recommends that the Council consider how existing activities across state, territory and federal levels could be coordinated to maximise opportunities and benefits.

Recommendation: that the Council consider how to maximise the benefit of the considerable footprint of many Australian education providers, including Go8 universities, across the regions, to encourage international students towards engaging in a regional experience.

Recommendation: That the Council recommend to government to extend access to funding provided under the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program to support clinical placements for international students.

The Go8 agrees that there are benefits to encouraging our international student cohorts to experience a variety of Australian locations while in-country.

However, while studying in the regions brings many advantages, so do the large metropolitan centres, and many students travel to Australia to experience life in our cities. We must be careful not to inadvertently damage our core attractiveness while attempting to broaden our appeal.



On 9 September this year, SBS reported that Prime Minister Scott Morrison was “considering ideas to push migrants to regional areas to deal with rapid growth in metropolitan cities”, and that “there could be merit in slowing the flow of international students to universities in Melbourne and Sydney”.¹

The Go8 suggests it might be prudent to consider unintended consequences of such messaging in a global market that has proven volatile. Some students travel to Australia on word of mouth recommendations from friends and family, and it is only natural they would look to study at the same institution. Others choose Australia because of relatives already living here, or to access the resources of a diaspora community.

Furthermore, while many international students seek work experience in Australia for a period of time following graduation, it would be a mistake to assume that all students who come here are pursuing a migration outcome.

China is seeing a growing number of returnees after completion of their studies,² and – despite a reported rise in demand for post study work visas here in Australia – the majority of international students return to their home countries.³

The Go8 has therefore been extremely concerned at recent suggestions that the government is considering the introduction of policy setting which would, in effect, direct international students away from the cities and towards the regions.

One mechanism that has been suggested is to apply Skilled Regional Provisional (subclass 489) criteria student visas, ie., requiring applicants to study in a regional or low population growth metropolitan area, or a “designated” area.⁴

While it might be well intentioned, any such move to force international students into particular areas within Australia, or which could be perceived as intended to do so, could instead drive high quality students who might otherwise have chosen to seek an education in Australia, to other English-speaking competitor nations such as the USA, UK, New Zealand or Canada.

It should also be noted that international students enrolled at a regional university are not always located in the regions. Many regional universities have recognised the attraction to international students of city based study and have established metropolitan centres to enable them to do so. For example, the University of New England “provides a physical presence and virtual connection for students studying at UNE in Western Sydney”;⁵ Central Queensland University has locations in the Brisbane CBD, Melbourne CBD, and Sydney CBD;⁶ and

¹ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/morrison-considered-ideas-to-push-international-students-migrants-to-small-cities>

² <https://thepienews.com/news/china-experiencing-influx-of-sea-turtles-as-increasing-number-of-grads-return-home/>

³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-27/temporary-graduate-visa-485-boom/10035390>

⁴ <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/skilled-regional-provisional-489/invited-pathway#About>

⁵ <https://www.une.edu.au/study/study-centres/une-sydney>

⁶ <https://www.cqu.edu.au/international-students/inbound/unique-study-locations>



Federation University has a campus in Berwick, located just 40 km from the Melbourne CBD.⁷ And, as noted by Phil Honeywood, Chief Executive of International Education Association of Australia (IEAA).⁸

Ironically, most of Australia's regional-based universities have already factored into their business models the enrolment behaviour of our nation's burgeoning international student numbers. They have chosen to contract out to third-party private colleges the delivery of entire degree courses in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. In other cases, they have rented office towers in these major cities and undertaken direct course delivery under their own regional university banner. In doing so, they are direct contributors to the public infrastructure demand in the big urban centres.

The Go8 therefore urges caution in the way that international students are discussed in the context of migration settings, due to the high level of risk of inadvertent messaging.

The Go8 does support continued access to post study work rights for international students following graduation. The opportunity for students to apply what they have learned from their studies in a workplace environment – while paying taxes into the Australian economy – is a significant point of Australia's attractiveness as a destination location. While some students will remain and seek permanent residency, others do return home or seek employment elsewhere in the global economy.

The volatility of the international education market, coupled with increased activity from alternative destination countries, means that care must be taken with changes to policies and settings that could – even if only inadvertently – have an impact.

The Go8 suggests instead that there are a number of creative solutions that could be harnessed to encourage more international students to have a regional experience during their time in Australia. We outline some during this submission, but in summary they include:

- Promoting the opportunities for international students to have a regional experience while based at metropolitan universities;
- Adjusting policy settings to allow metropolitan-based international students to access rural and regional locations for clinical placements; and
- Working with state governments to coordinate current activities to maximize opportunities and benefits.

Context

Australia is becoming increasingly reliant on the success of the international education sector, which underpins a wide range of areas of critical importance to our ongoing prosperity in the current geo-political climate. These include:

⁷ <https://campusmorningmail.com.au/news/federation-us-not-especially-regional-expansion/>

⁸ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/forced-regional-study-ranks-as-a-dumb-idea/news-story/17d917a7666639fec9c69cd0b9c048f4>

- **The Economy:** Education exports represent Australia's largest service export industry, and our third largest export industry overall.⁹ As noted by the Hon Dan Tehan, Minister for Education and Training, at the Australian International Education Conference in October of this year, the sector is now worth \$32 billion to the economy, up \$5 billion on last year, and supports more than 240,000 jobs.¹⁰ Independent analysis commissioned by the Go8 and undertaken by UK based London Economics found that **every three international students enrolled at a Go8 university generates \$1 million in economic impact.**¹¹ A 2015 report by Deloitte Access Economics estimated that for every dollar spent by an average international student studying in Melbourne, **30 cents of indirect gross value added was generated in regional Victoria.**¹² International students also generate significant tourism activity, with more than 230,000 friends and family travelling here to visit students during 2017 alone.¹³ At a time when some analysts are predicting Australia is at risk of a deep recession,¹⁴ and in the face of a market that has proven to be relatively fragile (see below), any changes to international education policy must be assessed against the potential to put such a high performing sector – and major Australian employer – at risk.
- **Australia's Place in the Indo-Pacific Region:** As noted in the 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper*, “[p]owerful drivers of change are converging in a way that is re-shaping the international order and challenging Australian interests”.¹⁵ In this context, building deep and resilient partnerships with countries across the Indo-Pacific is paramount to our ongoing prosperity and ability to engage effectively within a region of growing global significance. The strength of our higher education and research sectors are critical components of building that engagement, as students from as far afield as China, Latin America and Africa seek to be educated in Australia. It is no coincidence, for example, that education is identified by Mr Peter Varghese in the India Economic Strategy as the flagship sector for building engagement with India.
- **Australia's soft power capacity:** Australia's international education sector is a fundamental pillar of Australia's soft power capacity. International students who study in Australia build friendships, experience Australian culture, play sport, travel, and depart as ambassadors for Australian values and the Australian way of life. Some go on to become leaders and influencers throughout the region as they advance through their careers. Examples of prominent Go8 graduates include Andrew Liveris (the University of Queensland), Chairman and Chief Executive of the Dow Chemical Company; Professor Yiping Huang (the Australian National University), adviser on the Monetary Policy Committee for the People's Bank of China; and James Gorman, graduate of the University of Melbourne, Board Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Morgan Stanley. Others return as research students or seek research collaborations with Australian partners. This opens the door to using our expertise and knowledge to help address challenges in particular countries, or with global impact, such as terrorism, food security and water management. Helping to provide effective

⁹ <https://dfat.gov.au/trade/resources/trade-at-a-glance/Pages/top-goods-services.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://ministers.education.gov.au/tehan/australian-international-education-conference-2018>

¹¹ https://www.go8.edu.au/Go8_London-Economics-Report_Compelling-Facts.pdf

¹² <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>

¹³ <https://ministers.education.gov.au/tehan/australian-international-education-conference-2018>

¹⁴ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/property/banking-armageddon-if-class-actions-and-stricter-regulation-accompany-property-plunge-ubs/news-story/581d3a002ebbc5417352e3e4c1c728a9>

¹⁵ <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper>

solutions to significant problems promotes Australian expertise and credibility and helps to reduce unrest and instability across the region.

- **National security:** As noted in the *Foreign Policy White Paper*, “globalisation and technological change, including the reach and vulnerabilities of the internet, state fragility, and environmental stresses, will at times amplify a range of threats to Australia’s people, borders, economy and infrastructure”.¹⁶ This means Australia will need to be able to respond a range of new challenges, involving cybersecurity, data security and other technological developments. As a middle power, with a population of around 24 million people, we cannot compete on numbers against nations the size of Japan (126 million), Indonesia (260 million), the United States (326 million), or China (1.4 billion).¹⁷ Our competitiveness instead relies on innovation, ingenuity and creativity. Our international education sector also allows all of our students, both domestic and international, to study and live within a successful, peaceful, multicultural environment, a skill that will stand them in good stead in the diverse workplaces of the future. All of these factors contribute to the stability of Australia and the region, which in turn impact national security.

Yet we cannot take the success of this immensely important sector for granted. In fact, we have already witnessed its fragility. In 2010, following reports of attacks on Indian students, enrolments from Indian nationals dropped by almost 50%,¹⁸ an effect that has taken years to reverse. Then in April 2017, the Federal Minister for Education and Training was forced to implement damage control measures as early as two days after the announcement of proposed changes to 457 visas, due to concerns among prospective international students, despite the fact that student visas per se were not impacted.¹⁹ The latter example underlines how easily unintended messages can be projected to the international community regarding Australia’s attitude towards our international student cohorts.

It is therefore of critical importance to ensure that all policies that impact this important sector, whether directly or indirectly, must be subject to careful and thorough consideration. Any policies designed to impact the behavior of international students must be found to bring national benefits that outweigh the risks across all of the areas outlined above.

To fail to do so would gift competitor countries such as the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand and even traditional source countries such as China, with the global talent that might otherwise have sought educational services on Australian shores.

Recommendation: Policies designed to impact the behavior of international student must be found to bring national benefit that outweighs the risks to the critical areas of Australia’s national prosperity: to the economy, to national security, to our place in the Indo-Pacific region and to our soft power capacity.

¹⁶ <https://www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/foreign-policy-white-paper>

¹⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

¹⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8444870.stm>

¹⁹ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/what-have-we-done/news-story/80c12c68c470a992e593bbd7bfb1fb5c>

The *Consultation Paper* raises seven questions to which it is seeking responses. The key points raised in the discussion below are contextualized against each of these consultation questions by number.

Education as an Economic Driver

As noted above, Australia's international education export industry is a major driver of our economy, both directly and indirectly.

Also as noted above, the *India Economic Strategy* (IES), released earlier this year identified education as the flagship sector offering the single biggest opportunity for engagement to underpin our long economic relationship with a major regional presence.

However, in prioritising our capacity to attract international students, the *IES* is careful to stress the importance of taking a strategic – rather than opportunistic – approach to recruitment, that will support Australia's long-term goals:

"Attracting the best international students helps to maintain the quality of Australia's higher education system [and]... builds links with the next generation of Indian leaders in business, government and academia". For that reason, it recommends that "Australia's future growth and prosperity will be driven by our ability to generate and attract the 'best and brightest'".²⁰

The importance of ensuring that Australia maintains quality offerings is also underlined by our performance in international ranking systems.

Department of Education and Training data show that around a third of the international students who study at higher education level in Australia do so at a Go8 university.²¹ This is unlikely to be coincidental. The link between rankings performance and attractiveness to international students is well established,²² and Go8 members are consistently the leading Australian institutions in the major ranking systems.

For example, Australia has six universities in the top 100 of the highly prestigious Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), behind only the US (46) and the UK (8), and ahead of countries such as Germany (4), Canada (4), France (3) and China (3).²³ For a population of only 24 million, and a system of only 39 universities, this is a truly outstanding result, of which our nation should be proud.

However, if we were to impose conditions incentivising study in the regions at the expense of other, excellent metropolitan based institutions it could result in high quality, in-demand applicants turning away from Australia. In reality, we are not the only country seeking to recruit the 'best and brightest' students from across the globe.

²⁰ <https://dfat.gov.au/geo/india/ies/pdf/dfat-an-india-economic-strategy-to-2035.pdf>

²¹ Department of Education and Training, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data.

²² <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/international-students-will-pay-higher-fees-for-top-qs-universities/news-story/2bcce3c7d33de69716af0a990f44e3bc>

²³ <http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2018.html>

Any barriers that Australia places in their way – real or perceived, intended or inadvertent – could be the factor that persuades them they will be better off seeking opportunities and experience elsewhere.

This in turn could kick off a downward spiral. Less overseas talent lowers Australia's capacity to compete internationally at the highest levels, which in turn decreases our attractiveness to the next wave of 'best and brightest' minds. This is likely to make us increasingly irrelevant and unable to compete in a world driven by innovative and creative knowledge workers.

Therefore, whilst encouraging study into certain areas might seem like a simple way of supporting regional Australia, the stakes to the country overall are high.

Damage to our international education sector not only risks the prosperity of metropolitan institutions, but also has flow on effects to the rest of the community. Apart from direct revenues obtained from tuition fees, international students spend money on accommodation, food, travel, clothing, entertainment, tourism while they are in-county, and so on. And this spending does not just resonate in the cities. Deloitte Access Economics has noted that spending in the city of Melbourne adds gross value to regional Victoria,²⁴ and an analysis by London Economics on the economic impact of Go8 universities alone estimated a 2016 indirect and induced impact of around \$8.4 billion.²⁵ To put it another way, they found that every three international students enrolled at a Go8 university generates around \$1 million in economic impact.²⁶

What constitutes a 'regional' area?

The *Growing International Education in Regional Australia* consultation paper notes that it seeks to identify ways to "encourage international students to explore study destinations outside of Australia's major capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane".

While the Go8 agrees that there are many benefits to studying in cities such as Perth, Adelaide or Canberra, it is important to recognise that strategies designed to encourage study in these metropolitan locations will differ significantly from those needed to encourage students into areas that could truly be described as regional.

It is also clear from enrolment data that international students overwhelmingly prefer to study in larger centres. An AEI Research Snapshot from May 2018 shows 97% of international enrolments in 2017 were in major cities, and the most popular location for those in areas designated as 'regional' was Hobart.²⁷ While this does not mean that efforts shouldn't be made to encourage students to have a regional experience during their time in Australia, it does indicate that any efforts to force or coerce students to do so, or any efforts that could be *perceived* as intended in that way, risk turning prospective international students away from studying in Australia altogether. This would be nothing short of reckless in a context in which many competitor nations are

²⁴ <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/research-papers/Documents/ValueInternationalEd.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.go8.edu.au/economic-impact-go8-universities>

²⁶ https://www.go8.edu.au/Go8_London-Economics-Report_Compelling-Facts.pdf

²⁷ <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/Research-Snapshots/Documents/Location%20of%20International%20Students%20in%202017.pdf>



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seeking to increase their own share of international student cohorts, which could easily happen at Australia's expense.

There are good reasons why students cluster around metropolitan areas. Many international students rely on paid employment to support themselves while they are studying, as well as to gain valuable work experience to help distinguish them once they graduate into a highly competitive employment marketplace, whether here or overseas. For many, this is simply the reality of being able to afford to study outside of their home country, and Australia is unlikely to succeed in attracting significant numbers of international students into regional areas while opportunities for employment remain restricted compared to those available in cities.

However, if the primary purpose of the *Growing International Education in Regional Australia* inquiry is to find ways of encouraging students to consider locations outside of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, then there are a number of ways this could be achieved while recognizing the realities of the students' situation.

Government, institutions and communities will need to employ separate strategies for promoting a broader variety of Australian metropolitan areas as study destinations, and for encouraging students to have a regional experience during their time in Australia. Some of these are explored below.

[Consultation questions 1, 2].

Australian Metropolitan Areas

As noted above, there is a strong connection between performance in international ranking systems – as a proxy for quality – and attractiveness to international students.

With three Go8 members located outside Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, it also provides an advantage that can be leveraged to encourage more international students to consider destinations beyond the major capital cities. These institutions, along with other providers, are already promoted internationally by organisations such as StudyAdelaide, StudyNSW, StudyPerth and Study Canberra. Similarly, organisations such as Tourism Australia promote the benefits of Australia as a destination for business or leisure. Educational institutions, including universities and VET, also invest their own efforts in marketing and promotions. It may be that significant additional benefit could be gained in the first instance by exploring how these existing efforts could be combined in a coordinated way to maximise benefits and opportunities.

[Consultation questions 1, 4, 5].

Recommendation: the Go8 recommends that the Council consider how existing activities across state, territory and federal levels could be coordinated to maximise opportunities and benefits.

It is also likely that the major capital cities attract the largest numbers of students because they are the best known locations within Australia. There are many reasons for this: the larger population base with more significant migrant diaspora communities; greater infrastructure and employment opportunities; and the emphasis on these cities in Australia's popular culture.

Films, television and sporting events that gain international syndication are all part of the continual messages that Australia emits about itself, and it is not surprising that much of this occurs in major population centres. However, this inadvertently reinforces awareness of these locations at the expense of others.

For example, Australian MasterChef is reported to be “among the highest rating English-language programs in India”.²⁸ It is filmed in Melbourne. The *Real Housewives of Melbourne* promotes the titular city to its large audiences across the United States. *The Block*, which commenced filming in Sydney but later moved to Melbourne, screens in New Zealand, Finland, Canada, Sweden, the Philippines, Latin America Denmark and the Middle East.²⁹ And long running soaps, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, both which have long standing audiences across the UK, are set in Melbourne and Sydney respectively.

The popularity of these programmes could be leveraged to promote alternative areas across Australia. Many reality television programs lend themselves to promoting different Australian strengths. MasterChef could have a season set in the Barossa Valley region of South Australia, for example, and feature the University of Adelaide’s expertise in viticulture through the National Wine Centre, or in agriculture through the Waite Institute.

In 2012 the University of Queensland, in partnership with the UQ Confucius Institute and the Australian Chinese General Chamber of Business, ran a 10-week course on Chinese culinary cuisine. The course featured guest chefs Poh Ling Yeow, 2011 MasterChef finalist and host of the ABC’s Poh’s Kitchen, and Dan Hong, Executive Chef of Mr Wong, Ms G’s and El Loco, and guest chef on MasterChef.

In 2016 UQ produced Ben’s Food Lab, a television series hosted by alumnus, science teacher and MasterChef finalist Ben Milbourne. The program used cookery to demonstrate common scientific principles aimed at school children from years 5-10. A variety of videos, worksheets and classroom activities were produced to accompany the series, and distributed to viewers on request.³⁰

These two examples demonstrate how popular television shows could be leveraged to promote the lifestyle, learning opportunities and expertise available in various locations around Australia.

The federal government could consider partnering with state governments or state-based agencies to production companies to produce incentives designed to encourage consideration of alternative locations.

[Consultation questions 1, 4, 5].

Promoting regional experiences

As noted above, one alternative to full degree study in the regions is to promote international students undertaking a regional experience during their study. This can be offered either as part of their studies or as an extra-curricular experience opportunity.

²⁸ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/masterchef-australia-curries-favour-in-india/news-story/86ae668ddbcd804e80b0be9ac32c4da1>

²⁹ <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/australian-tv-shows-prove-popular-in-global-market-20150527-ghaqtq.html>

³⁰ <http://www.uq.edu.au/bens-food-lab/about>



For example, the Go8 universities were among the first in Australia to establish Rural Clinical Schools to bring world-class medical education to rural Australia. Most of these schools offer longitudinal integrated rural placements or block rotations providing students with multiple opportunities to practice skills and experience rural life. Similarly, Australia's largest provider of education in agriculture, the University of Melbourne, offers its Bachelor of Agriculture students an opportunity to undertake a semester of practical learning at its working farm and science facility, in Dookie, 180 kilometers north east of Melbourne.

Go8 universities also train nearly 60% of all higher education veterinary students in Australia, and 76% of all international veterinary students.³¹ Go8 vet facilities with a focus on regional and rural needs include University of Queensland's Equine Specialist Hospital at Gatton, University of Adelaide's Production Animal Health Centre at Roseworthy, the University of Sydney's Livestock Veterinary Teaching and Research Unit at Camden and the University of Melbourne's Equine Centre at Werribee.

Indeed, Go8 universities collectively offer over 550 locations outside major metropolitan locations for medical and health placements (see Figure 1), and have campuses, clinical presences or facilities in 41 locations across regional Australia, including Port Headland, Kalgoorlie, Dubbo and Spring Ridge (Figure 2).³² Locations such as these offer considerable opportunity for students to engage in a regional experience during their time in Australia, while still being primarily located in a major metropolitan area for financial or other reasons. They also provide the opportunity to understand, in a practical sense, how skills and knowledges learned in a metropolitan area can be applied in a variety of settings. For example, doctors working in rural settings may be required to manage a wider variety of conditions, due to a lower density of specialists in rural areas.

However, under current settings, funding provided under the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program cannot be used to support clinical placements for international students. This is a major barrier to giving international students enrolled in metropolitan universities access to a rural experience via such a placement. Addressing this issue is one practical step the government could take to dramatically increase the numbers of international students who spend time in regional areas while studying.

Recommendation: that the Council consider how to maximise the benefit of the considerable footprint of many Australian education providers, including Go8 universities, across the regions, to encourage international students towards engaging in a regional experience.

Recommendation: That the Council recommend to government extending access to funding provided under the Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program to support clinical placements for international students

[Consultation questions 3, 5, 6].

³¹ Department of Education and Training, Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2017 Student Data.

³² <https://go8.edu.au/publication/go8-submission-independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>



The Go8 looks forward to being involved in further consultations about this important strategic area. We welcome any further opportunities to contribute to this important process.

Yours sincerely

VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Group of Eight: Medical and Health Placement Locations

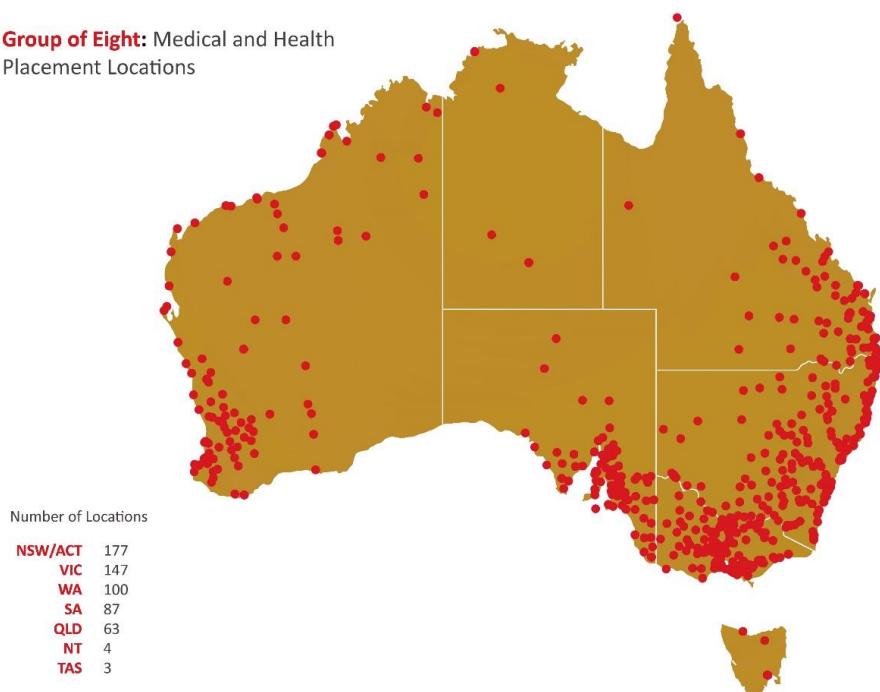


Figure 1: Group of Eight: Medical and Health Placement Locations

Group of Eight Regional Campuses,
Clinical Presences and Facilities

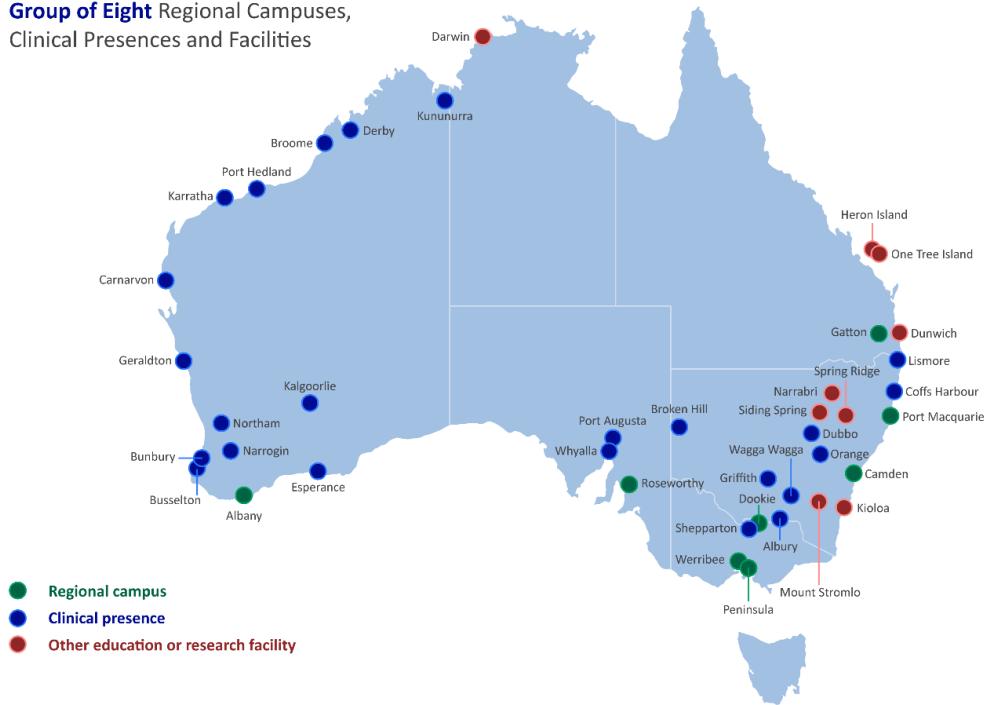


Figure 2: Group of Eight Regional Campuses, Clinical Presences and Facilities