

**GROUP
OF EIGHT
AUSTRALIA**

Essential decisions for national success

Supporting Australia's international
education and research sector



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Foreword

International education is fundamental to the higher education sector and also to the health and prosperity of the nation. It is directly linked to economic growth and the opportunity of higher living standards.

Pre-COVID-19, international education was Australia's largest services export and fourth largest export overall.¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data confirms that revenue has almost halved over the course of the pandemic – from \$40.3 billion in 2019 to \$22.5 billion in 2021.²

COVID-19 has laid bare how much Australia relies on education imports to supplement our locally grown talent base.

Data from the Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) highlights Australia's vulnerability in key areas. In 2020, international students accounted for 61 per cent of enrolments in Information Technology, 43 per cent in Engineering and Related Technologies, and 30 per cent in Architecture and Building.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data confirms that revenue has almost halved over the course of the pandemic – from \$40.3 billion in 2019 to \$22.5 billion in 2021.²

1 https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias_goods_and_services_by_top_25_exports_2019.pdf (2019 year)

2 ABS, 5368.0 International Trade in Goods and Services, Australia, Table 11a, released 3 February 2022

Foreword

International Higher Degree Research (HDR) students – or students studying for a PhD or masters by research – accounted for 56 per cent in Information Technology, 61 per cent in Engineering and Related Technologies, 44 per cent in Agriculture and Environmental Studies and 40 per cent in Natural and Physical Sciences.³

We cannot afford to be disconnected from the global pool of talent that is increasingly critical to our – and our competitors’ – success.

Without these students – and the graduates they become – our nation will struggle to make economic headway and so continue to fall behind our competitor nations.

We cannot afford to be disconnected from the global pool of talent that is increasingly critical to our – and our competitors’ – success. This was a key industry concern articulated to the Go8 during 2021 stakeholder consultations and again at the Go8 Engineering Industry Summit held on 2 December 2021.⁴

International connections also help to ensure that universities are able to foster a domestic talent base to its full capacity.

Without connections to cutting edge developments made offshore, young Australians will not be able to capitalise on their potential if they remain in this country. Current policy is fostering a looming brain drain.

³ <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2020-student-data-0> (2020 is the most recent year for which data is available)

⁴ See Go8 *Essential decisions for national success: Securing the Future of Australia's Engineering Workforce*, <https://go8.edu.au/report-securing-the-future-of-australias-engineering-workforce>

Connections are the value of agreements such as the AUKUS alliance which will foster engagement with experts in the US and the UK to develop a new industry based around domestic nuclear-technology capability.

It is also the value of building relationships with key regional partners, such as ASEAN, to forge the people-to-people connections that can ensure Australia remains an engaged and informed member of the Indo-Pacific.

Go8 universities, as Australia's consistently leading research-intensive universities, are at the forefront of this engagement. Our expertise, developed via collaborations between our best minds and those located overseas, must be leveraged to help produce the high-quality graduates on which Australia will increasingly rely; fuel new discoveries and understanding through our high-quality research; and

achieve profitable commercialisation outcomes by partnering with large international companies or industries not yet represented onshore.

We can also facilitate engagement through our extensive global networks, particularly with Australia's key multi-lateral partner such as the Five Eyes Plus nations, the QUAD and ASEAN.⁵

It is also the value of building relationships with key regional partners, such as ASEAN, to forge the people-to-people connections that can ensure Australia remains an engaged and informed member of the Indo-Pacific.

5 Involving Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand

Summary of recommendations

to support Australia's international education and research sector

Australia is facing serious challenges to ensure there is capacity in essential workforce areas – and this includes the engineering and medical workforce. The Go8 has outlined how to support this urgently needed domestic supply in our *Essential Decisions for Success* policy paper series,⁶ but this in itself will not be sufficient.

Australia must also supplement and develop domestic supply by recruiting from the global pool of talent. This too is urgent as the global pool of talent is much sought after. An incoming Government should bring Australia into line with other Five Eyes and allied nations by introducing legislation which exempts high quality international PhD or masters graduates from immigration caps if they are in STEM fields or areas critical to Australia's workforce needs. The processing of these visas must be prioritised.

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- **Recommendation 1:** An incoming Government must introduce a High Potential Individual (HPI) Visa. This visa would be designed to supplement the existing Global Talent Visa Program and post graduate study rights access by targeting high achieving graduates from top global universities in areas of workforce need.

COVID-19 has shown how local challenges can quickly escalate to become global. COVID-19 has also demonstrated what it is possible to achieve when the world's best and brightest scientific minds are enabled to work together for the collective good.

COVID-19 has shown how local challenges can quickly escalate to become global.

⁶ <https://go8.edu.au/category/essential-decisions>

Prior to the global pandemic, coronaviruses had largely eluded efforts to produce successful vaccines.⁷ Now, the World Health Organisation (WHO) lists nine as having obtained Emergency Use Listing (EUL).⁸

Government investment in Australian researchers to participate in global research programs and exchanges is an investment in Australia's future prosperity. It is also much-needed insurance to ensure that, whatever challenge is next on the horizon – be it antibiotic resistance, cyber threats, food or water security, extreme climate events, or another global pandemic – we have the knowledge and expertise necessary to secure effective and evidence-based solutions.

A high quality, highly trained, globally engaged network of researchers should be considered a fundamental part of Australia's essential infrastructure. A prosperous, competitive and successful future cannot be attained without that.

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- **Recommendation 2:** An incoming Government must provide strategic support to advance national priorities, including:
 - » Increased support for researcher exchanges in areas of specific need to support key national agreements such as AUKUS.
 - » Bilateral research funding to leverage the advantages offered by the first ever innovation chapter in the Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement.
 - » Support to deepen our engagement with key regional architecture nations such as ASEAN and the QUAD.
 - » Commit to supporting Australian researcher access to the €95.5 billion Horizon Europe program via third country association or dedicated funding to enable participation.⁹

7 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2020-04-17/coronavirus-vaccine-ian-frazer/12146616>

8 [https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-vaccines](https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-vaccines)

9 See also Recommendation 10 in the *Essential Decisions for Success* research policy paper, <https://go8.edu.au/category/essential-decisions>

Summary of recommendations to support Australia's international education and research sector

Australia's border closure during the pandemic, while necessary to limit the spread of the disease until vaccines were in use, resulted in a degree of disconnect with the international student community.

This has coincided with Australia finding itself at a critical juncture with its skills needs. An incoming Government and the higher education sector must work together to re-establish our position in the market as an attractive and open destination country; one welcoming incoming talent and an engaged member of the Indo-Pacific.

- **Recommendation 3:** An incoming Government must provide support to increase re-engagement and diversification of the international education sector by:
 - » Helping to establish new markets and re-engage with existing ones to provide a pipeline of talent.
 - » Developing a national scholarship program that would encourage high performing students from a diverse range of nations in areas such as engineering, IT or quantum technologies.

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- » Developing a two-way New Colombo Plan-type program to operate in additional regions of interest, such as Latin America.
 - » Re-establish the Endeavour Leadership Program which supported two-way mobility for research and professional development with priority partner countries.

At the same time, the needs of competitive economies and prosperous societies are becoming more complex.

Industries will increasingly require a workforce with capabilities that come from higher level study, and research-enabled graduates who can drive discovery and industry.

Postgraduate and higher degree research education enables people achieve these higher levels of capability and contributes to the growth and development of Australia's workforce. Australia should seek to position itself as the region's provider of choice for high quality postgraduate and research education.

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- **Recommendation 4:** An incoming Government must work with the higher education sector to ensure that offices such as Austrade are best enabled to position and promote Australian providers globally, including by building connections, understanding and trust with universities, schools and industry in other countries.

Excessive and unwarranted red tape not only limits productivity and impacts national prosperity, but also risks making Australia uncompetitive in the global competition for talent.

The Go8 paper *Essential Decisions for National Success: Reducing the Regulatory Overload on our Universities*¹⁰ explores this in more detail, the negative impact of regulatory overload on our capacity to re-build the international education sector must not be overlooked.

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- **Recommendation 5:** An incoming Government must ensure that legislation impacting the higher education sector is effective, and avoids overlap, duplication and redundancy. This is more fully set out in the Go8 report *Essential Decisions for National Success: Reducing the Regulatory Overload on our Universities*. Poorly crafted legislation not only risks being ineffective but it can make Australia uncompetitive in global education and research provision.

Australia should seek to position itself as the region's provider of choice for high quality postgraduate and research education.

¹⁰ See <https://go8.edu.au/report-reducing-the-regulatory-overload-on-our-universities>

Detailed recommendations

for an incoming Government

- **Recommendation 1: A High Potential Individual (HPI) Visa to target areas of workforce need**
- **Recommendation 2: Strategic support to advance national priorities**
- **Recommendation 3: Support for re-engagement and diversification of the international education sector**
- **Recommendation 4: An incoming Government must ensure that offices such as Austrade are best positioned to support international education and research engagement**
- **Recommendation 5: Ensure legislation for the higher education sector does not constrain Australia's global competitiveness**

1 A High Potential Individual (HPI) Visa to target areas of workforce need

Australia is not alone in our need to attract critical talent. The global competition for this talent is increasing.

Key international competitors are rapidly positioning themselves as destinations of choice for the highly skilled and talented individuals who will increasingly underpin successful and prosperous economies.

The US COMPETES Act, now progressing through the legislative system, contains measures to exempt international PhD or masters graduates from immigration caps if they are in STEM fields or areas critical to US needs.¹¹

It will also allow international students in STEM fields to claim “dual intent” of both studying and pursuing a career in the US after graduation.¹²

The UK has a specific visa class to facilitate the recruitment of academic or research leaders or potential leaders in science, medicine, engineering or humanities. This is the UK Global Talent visa, which came into effect in February 2020 and leads to settlement within 3–5 years with a pathway to British citizenship.¹³ The UK is also set to launch a High Potential Individual (HPI) scheme at the end of May 2022. This is intended to make it “as simple as possible” to attract high potential, internationally mobile graduates from selected universities. It is aimed at helping employers fill workplace shortages with high talent individuals.¹⁴

11 See H.R.4521, p.2212; see also The Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S. Code 1151 (b)(1)

12 See H.R.4521, p 2216

13 <https://www.gov.uk/global-talent-researcher-academic>

14 Eligible universities must have been ranked in the top 50 in two out of the following three ranking systems: Times Higher Education World University rankings; Quacquarelli Symonds World University rankings; and The Academic Ranking of World Universities. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-03-15/hcws680>

Recommendation 1: A High Potential Individual (HPI) Visa to target areas of workforce need

Canada has announced an extension of post-graduation work permits for recent international graduates, and those whose permits will expire this year.¹⁵

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced a “golden visa for outstanding students and graduates” for graduates from the world’s top 100 universities worldwide.¹⁶

In contrast, Australia’s borders remained largely closed for two years. This created the perception amongst some in the region that we have turned inwards and become insular. We are behind other nations in re-establishing both our international sector and our post-pandemic engagement with the world.

As shown in Figure 1, lodgements for a higher education visa from primary applicants have fallen during the pandemic period, overall (down 42 per cent) and from the key markets of China (down 44 per cent) and India (down 50 per cent).¹⁷

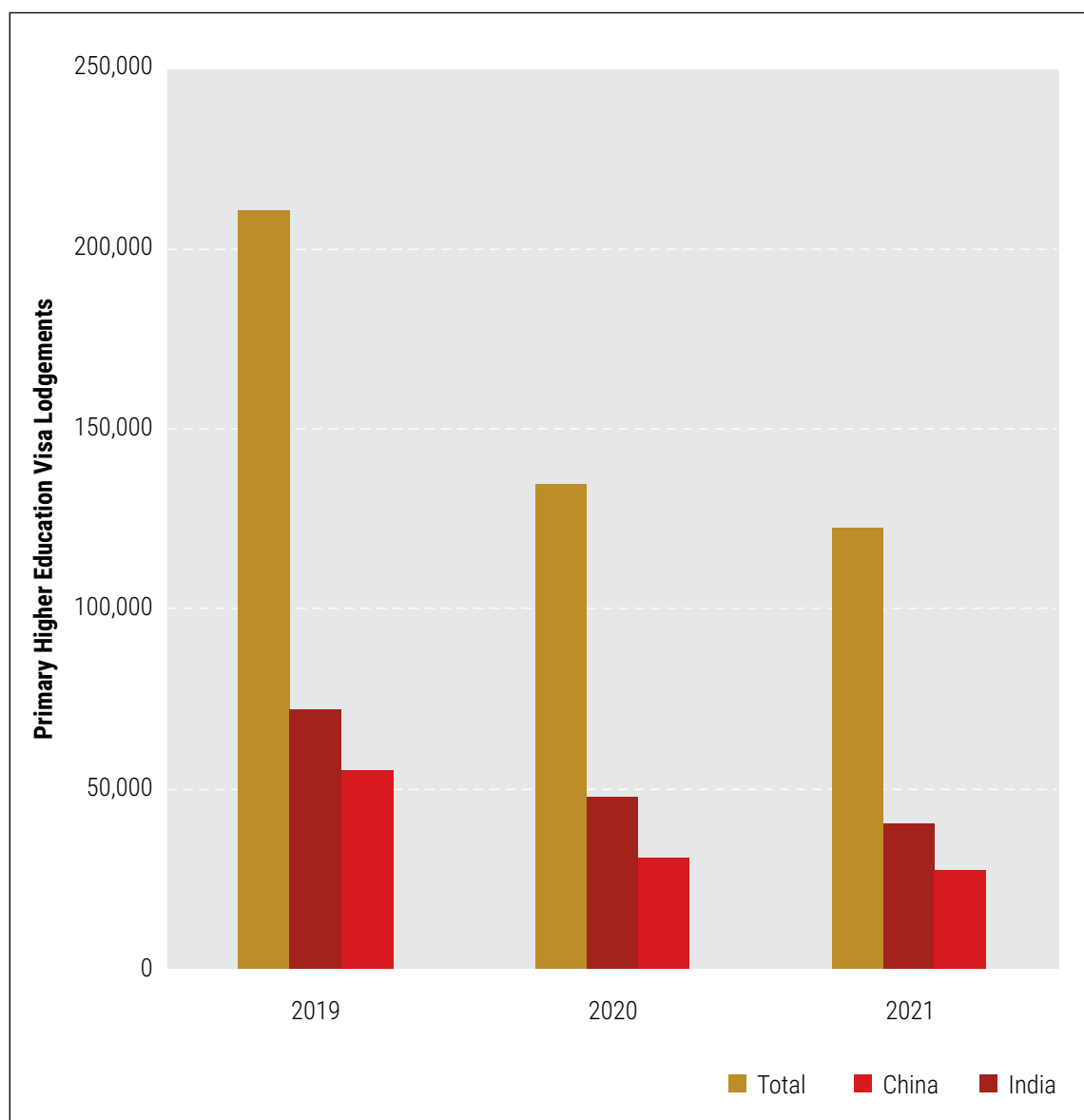
The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced a “golden visa for outstanding students and graduates” for graduates from the world’s top 100 universities worldwide.¹⁶ In contrast, Australia’s borders remained largely closed for two years.

¹⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/04/new-measures-to-address-canadas-labour-shortage.html>

¹⁶ <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395303040263>

¹⁷ Visa data taken from the Department of Home Affairs and is current as of 28 April 2022. Primary lodgement refers to the person proposing to study in Australia alone (absent any dependents). <https://data.gov.au/dataset/ds-dga-324aa4f7-46bb-4d56-bc2d-772333a2317e/details>

Figure 1: Primary Visa Lodgements, Higher Education Visa, 2019-2021



Source: Department of Home Affairs

Recommendation 1: A High Potential Individual (HPI) Visa to target areas of workforce need

Without effective re-engagement strategies, we risk being unable to import much needed talent, and also vital disengagement from the international exchanges that fuel development and discovery which could see home grown individuals lured to live and work overseas in more exciting, engaged, dynamic and lucrative economies. In other words, we have created the climate ripe for a brain drain.

We also risk weakening our own research workforce. Building strong linkages with our international PhD students who go on to become the next generation of research leaders will ensure that Australia remains a partner of choice as they themselves progress a research careers.

Australia cannot assume that our international education industry will simply bounce back to pre-pandemic levels with the re-opening of the borders. However, it does present an opportunity to reshape the sector to better serve the needs of industry, the economy and Australian society.

Australia should seize this rare opportunity to reposition ourselves for success in a post-pandemic world. We should create a new paradigm where international students are not seen in economic terms, but increasingly as a rich reservoir of much valued and much needed talent. In doing so we need to re-establish our credentials as an engaged and interested regional partner.

Recommendation 1:

An incoming Government must introduce a High Potential Individual (HPI) Visa, designed to supplement the existing Global Talent Visa Program and post graduate study rights access by targeting high achieving graduates from top global universities in areas of workforce need. The processing of these visas must be prioritised.

2 Strategic support to advance national priorities

Research is a fundamental part of Australia's international success, and of the strength of our higher education system.

Australia's research performance has earned it significant global recognition, reflected in the prestigious Academic Ranking of World Universities, where the Go8 has seven of its universities ranked among the top 100 in the world. They were outperformed by only the US with 40 in the top 100 and the UK with eight and China equal with the Go8, with seven.¹⁸

The Go8's global rankings have led us to discoveries such as Gardasil and Elastagen,¹⁹ and is fuelling future breakthroughs such as the bionic eye,²⁰ or more stable solar cells.²¹

Research capacity also attracts international investment, such as the landmark \$200 million agreement between the Go8 and UK based IP Group.²²

And it will increasingly underpin Australia's prosperity and competitiveness in the knowledge-based global economy.

...the Go8 has seven of its universities ranked among the top 100 in the world.

18 <https://www.shanghairanking.com/rankings/arwu/2021>

19 Go8 Facts of Distinction: <https://go8.edu.au/go8-publication-facts-of-distinction-2020>

20 <https://www.monash.edu/industry/why-work-with-us/success-stories/bionic-eye>

21 <https://stories.uq.edu.au/news/eait/2020/solar-technology-breakthrough-uq/index.html>

22 <https://go8.edu.au/ip-groups-patient-money-a-200m-research-booster>

Recommendation 2: Strategic support to advance national priorities

A 2019 Harvard University study highlighted that, while Australia is a high-income country, it has a relatively low economic complexity. In other words, our economy relies largely on material exports, rather than the development of complex products which support higher wages. The study predicts that unless Australia can increase its economic complexity – i.e., adapt to reflect changes in the global economy – it will rank in the bottom half of countries over the next decade.²³

The study predicts that unless Australia can increase its economic complexity – i.e., adapt to reflect changes in the global economy – it will rank in the bottom half of countries over the next decade.²³

A positive is that the excellence of our research – if supported and enabled to do so – should provide us with the tools we need to reshape our economy to the new reality, and to help our nation thrive in the future.

We are also well placed to manage the risks associated with international engagement. Research stewardship – where we work to protect research that needs to be protected while not damaging our ability to engage as a high quality and valued partner – will be instrumental in determining whether Australia is able to capitalise on its research talent to the benefit of the national economy and wellbeing and living standards of the community.

The Go8 has been at the forefront of developing effective tools to help the higher education sector manage national security research risks. The *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the University System*²⁴ provides the sector with the necessary guidance to establish good stewardship of research,

²³ <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/countries/14/growth-opportunities>

²⁴ <https://www.dese.gov.au/guidelines-counter-foreign-interference-australian-university-sector>

proportionate to each university and activity's level of risk. It has also been recognised by our international partners as a global exemplar.

It is essential that Australia continue to maintain an appropriate balance that provides reassurance to ourselves and our partners that our high quality and sensitive research is

protected with adequate safeguards, while not damaging our capacity to engage with the best researchers the world has to offer, wherever they may be located.

If Australia can manage this delicate balance, and can capitalise on its research capacity, we will be well set up to thrive in coming decades.

Recommendation 2:

An incoming Government must provide strategic support to advance national priorities, including:

- **Increased support for researcher exchanges in areas of specific need to support key national agreements such as AUKUS.**
- **Bilateral research funding to leverage the advantages offered by the first ever innovation chapter in the Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement.**
- **Support to deepen our engagement with key regional architecture nations such as ASEAN and the QUAD.**
- **Commit to supporting Australian researcher access to the €95.5 billion Horizon Europe program via third country association or dedicated funding to enable participation.**

3 Support for re-engagement and diversification of the international education sector

Australia is at a critical juncture with its skills needs. This directly impacts the capacity of industry to recruit the talent it requires and for Australia to engage with rapid advancements globally. Consideration must be given to the specific capability requirements of national priorities such as the AUKUS agreement, and the Australian-US joint statement on cooperation in quantum science and technology, amongst others.

There are several ways an incoming Government can support the higher education sector to rebuild and increase the diversity of our international education sector, while addressing much needed skills and capability gaps in the Australian workforce.

Global scholarships that target areas of national priority – such as engineering and medicine as well as emerging and technology-based disciplines – would demonstrate that Australia values and is keen to invest in the development of international talent while providing a real incentive to boost our position against other competitive nations.

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This should be combined with revised visa policy settings for graduates who are targeted by industry for particular national skills needs, and to ensure these graduates are enabled to remain and contribute to Australia's domestic capability.

The New Colombo Plan has proven to be a huge success in encouraging young Australians to actively engage and participate in the Indo-Pacific region. Since commencing in 2014, it now supports around 10,000 undergraduate students a year to study or undertake an internship in 40 locations across our region.²⁵

An incoming Government can leverage the success of this program by expanding it to other regions of opportunity, such as Latin America, and introducing a reverse Colombo Plan mirror program to provide students of other nations with the opportunity to have an Australian education experience.

Similarly, the successful Endeavour Leadership Program, discontinued in the 2019 Budget, was a long-running merit-based program that enabled the best and brightest from Australia to develop their skills and knowledge overseas, with a reciprocal program for international talent to do the same in Australia.

If Australia is to maintain – let alone improve – our economic and social prosperity, it is imperative that our population's talents and abilities can be developed to their full potential, and that Australia is embedded as a valued and respected member within the Indo-Pacific.

²⁵ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/about>

Recommendation 3: Support for re-engagement and diversification of the international education sector

If Australia is to maintain – let alone improve – our economic and social prosperity, it is imperative that our population’s talents and abilities can be developed to their full potential, and that Australia is embedded as a valued and respected member within the Indo-Pacific.

Restoring the Endeavour Leadership Program, and leveraging the success of the New Colombo Plan, will help to achieve this goal while promoting Australia as an education provider to diverse markets across our region and the globe.

Recommendation 3:

An incoming Government must provide support to increase re-engagement and diversification of the international education sector by:

- **Helping to establish new markets and re-engage with existing ones to provide a pipeline of talent.**
- **Developing a national scholarship program that would encourage high performing students from a diverse range of nations in areas such as engineering, IT or quantum technologies.**
- **Developing a two-way New Colombo Plan-type program to operate in additional regions of interest, such as Latin America.**
- **Re-establish the Endeavour Leadership Program which supported two-way mobility for research and professional development with priority partner countries.**

4 An incoming Government must ensure that offices such as Austrade are best positioned to support international education and research engagement

Australia has a key advantage with its location within the Indo-Pacific region.

Government and the higher education sector working together could take greater advantage of this than by working alone. Austrade already undertakes a range of activities aimed at assisting Australian industries engage internationally. This does include higher education. However, a post-pandemic, more competitive environment provides an opportune environment to evaluate how this can be adjusted and/or improved to better support Australia's prosperity via its universities.

Education and research are not only important sectors in their own right, they fuel the workforce more broadly, with a contribution to the overall national landscape that extends well beyond their boundaries.

As noted by senior diplomat and former Foreign Affairs Secretary, Peter Varghese AO in the 2018 *India Economic Strategy*: "Education is identified as the flagship sector of the future because... the way in which an education and training demand weaves its way through virtually every sector of the Indian economy".²⁶

²⁶ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/minisite/static/07db88b0-d450-4887-9c90-31163d206162/ies/pdf/dfat-an-india-economic-strategy-to-2035.pdf>

Recommendation 4: An incoming Government must ensure that offices such as Austrade are best positioned to support international education and research engagement

Australia must position itself as a provider of excellence and choice for postgraduate and higher degree researchers. Focusing on the higher skills end of the market will increase our attractiveness to R&D active regional industries. This in turn will position Australia as a partner of choice for commercialisation and research collaboration opportunities.

In contrast to the declining demand for a higher education visa (Figure 1), Figure 2 demonstrates that demand for a postgraduate research visa – though suffering a decline in 2020 – began the process of recovery in 2021, recording increases relative to 2020 both overall (9.3 per cent) and for the Chinese market (14 per cent).

This suggests that demand for a high-quality research education in Australia may be more resilient than other levels of higher education.

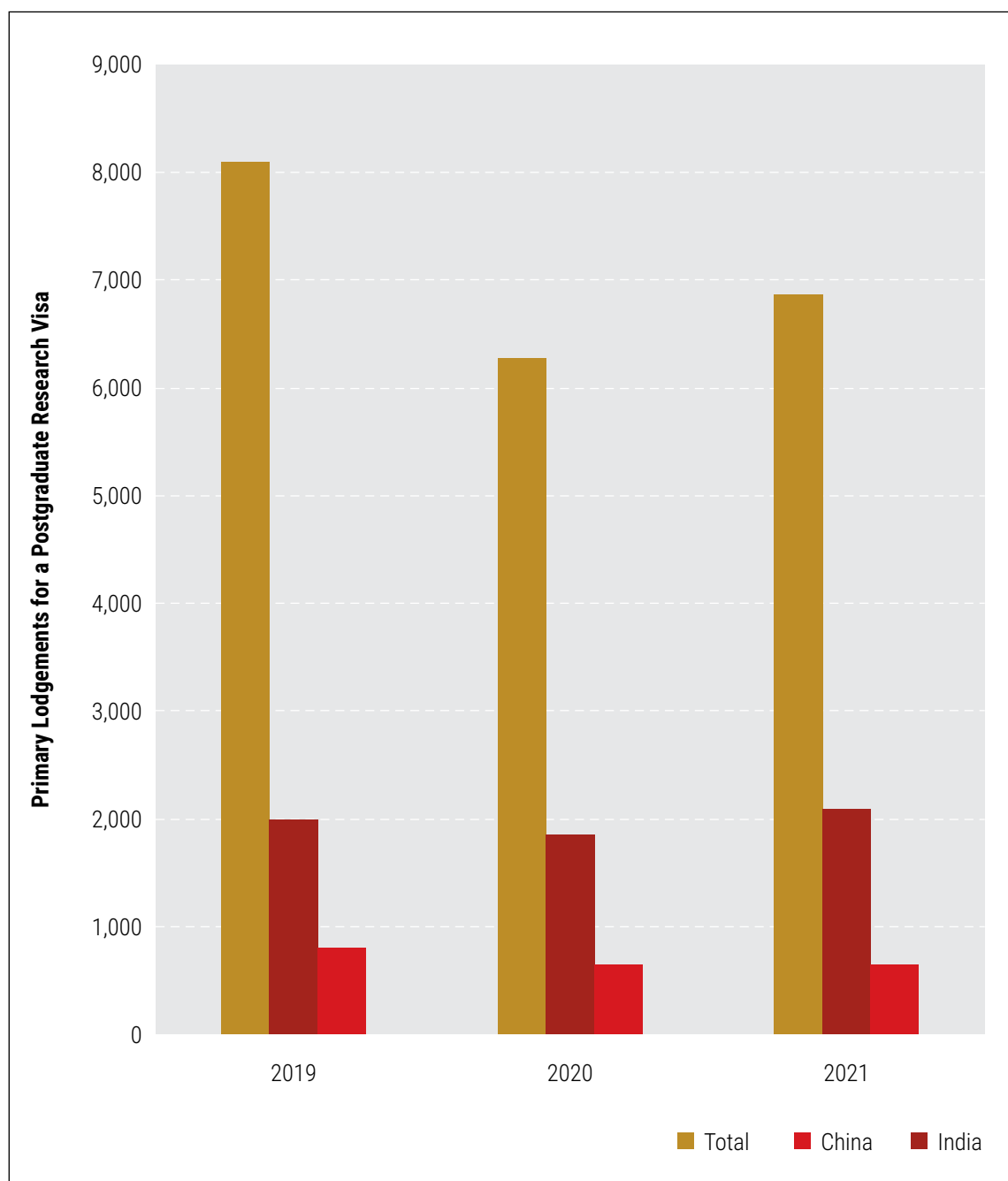
An incoming Government must work with the higher education sector to identify whether elements of the successful British Council model could be incorporated into aspects of Austrade's operations to position us for the future.

Focusing on the higher skills end of the market will increase our attractiveness to R&D active regional industries.

Recommendation 4:

An incoming Government must work with the higher education sector to ensure that offices such as Austrade are best enabled to position and promote Australian providers globally, including by building connections, understanding and trust with universities, schools and industry in other countries.

Figure 2: Primary Visa Lodgements, Postgraduate Research Visa, 2019-2021



Source: Department of Home Affairs

5 Ensure legislation for the higher education sector does not constrain Australia's global competitiveness

This recommendation builds on the recommendations in the Go8 paper *Essential Decisions for National Success: Reducing the Regulatory Overload on our Universities*.

However, it is important to understand that regulatory burden, or poorly crafted legislation does not only interfere with the efficiency and productivity of Australia's universities, but makes us uncompetitive and unattractive in the global competition for talent.

Legislation aimed at addressing specific concerns within Australia can be interpreted broadly by potential international partners. This has already been found to be damaging such as the clauses in the recently introduced *Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory) Act 2020*, which despite much advocacy against the clauses, allows for partnerships to be cancelled at any point by a future Minister without the Minister having to provide any public explanation.

This has led some partners to conclude that collaborations with Australia have too much sovereign risk for them when alternative partners are available.

Strong international education and research partnerships fundamentally underpin our national security by building the people to people and institutional links that underpin the global alliances on which our national security increasingly relies.

Strong international education and research partnerships fundamentally underpin our national security by building the people to people and institutional links that underpin the global alliances on which our national security increasingly relies.

Research and science lie at the heart of agreements such as AUKUS (through technology and science collaboration),²⁷ the QUAD (through the QUAD Fellowships supporting

100 masters or PhD students per year),²⁸ and the 2019 Joint Statement of Australia and the United States of America on Cooperation in Quantum Science and Technology.²⁹

Ensuring that Australia has a streamlined and effective regulatory and legislative framework is one way in which an incoming Government can support our high achieving universities to deliver on Australian capability and workforce needs.

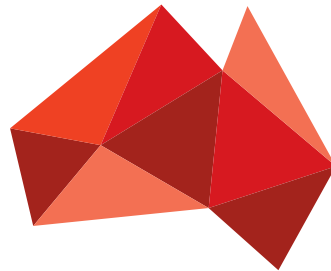
Recommendation 5:

An incoming Government must ensure that legislation impacting the higher education sector is effective, and avoids overlap, duplication and redundancy, as detailed in the Go8 report *Essential Decisions for National Success: Reducing the Regulatory Overload on our Universities*. Poorly crafted legislation not only risks being ineffective but can make Australia uncompetitive in global education and research provision.

²⁷ <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/address-aukus-canberra-act>

²⁸ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-summit/>

²⁹ <https://www.industry.gov.au/news/australia-signs-quantum-technology-cooperation-agreement-with-united-states>



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