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Submission to the 2015 *Draft National Strategy for International Education* - questionnaire by Jack Goodman, CEO and Founder of YourTutor

In April 2015 the Department of Education and Training released the Draft National Strategy for International Education for consultation from business leaders and employer groups to identify opportunities to better link students to meaningful work experience and career opportunities. Jack Goodman, CEO and Founder of YourTutor, provides a response to the Draft questionnaire to enhance Australia's international education strategy.

Please outline your (or your organisation's) interest in Australian international education. Add any other relevant content.

YourTutor provides online, on-demand academic support for both international and domestic higher education students. Our focus includes the support of English language skills essential for the success of international students.

Since inception we have delivered over one million online tutorials. Our current higher education clients include 18 TAFE Colleges, 8 universities and 2 private VET educational institutions.

Our organisation's continued growth and success is heavily reliant upon the ability of the Australian higher education sector to remain competitive in attracting international students.

Does the vision statement in the draft strategy represent Australia's aspirations for international education?

In our view the statement is useful but insufficient, as it does not adequately address desired outcomes for all stakeholders, most notably students.

A truly inclusive vision statement must include the sector's commitment to delivering services and outcomes of outstanding quality to international students.

Are any significant goals for international education not adequately covered?

The draft strategy's goals are well conceived. There is, however, a critical area that requires greater emphasis - **English language proficiency**. The elephant in the room is the inadequate support provided by higher education institutions in this regard.

We propose that section 5.3 be expanded to acknowledge that the sector has an obligation to students to provide sufficient services to remove this issue as the greatest barrier to international student success in Australia.

We are further concerned by the statement in section 5.3. that "While international students need to demonstrate a suitable level of English language proficiency when they begin their study, there are concerns that they do not always maintain this proficiency through their study." We believe the strategy should either acknowledge the need for a higher level of

demonstrated proficiency to begin study, or better verification of current English capacity of new international students. This is the single biggest risk to student success.

We believe many participants in the sector currently overlook or ignore risks associated with enrolling international students with marginal English language skills. This not only risks their own reputation in the quest for short-term gain but also the sector's more generally.

Can you identify the strategic actions, which best support your goals for international education?

Our goal (and enterprise) is in substantial part oriented towards improving the English language capabilities of ESL students. Achieving this end would allow students to move beyond language as a barrier to more effectively absorbing the benefits of higher education. By providing on-demand, online and personalised English language tuition we are ideally placed to enable the skills necessary for both students and the sector to thrive.

- **Section 4.1. Attracting students from around the world.**
 - As noted above, the development of English language skills is a prerequisite for academic success. Building the Australian sector's capabilities therein has the potential to become a significant strategic and competitive advantage.
- **Section 5.3. Improving English language proficiency**
 - The vast majority of international students are non-native English speakers. One of their primary goals is being able to interact in the world's predominant business / professional language.
 - Our objective in providing online, on-demand and personalised English tuition for every student enrolled in an Australian higher education institution is directly aligned with this strategic action.
- **Section 6.1. Leading good practice in modes of delivery, including online.**
 - Our services are accessible via virtually any Internet browser or device and are accessed by students across multiple time zones and locations.
 - We applaud the emphasis placed upon scalability and accessibility within this draft and will be further encouraged when more institutions move beyond planning into action in this regard.
 - The document credits its funding of 13 projects as part of the Broadband Enabled Education and Skills Services Programme. Our service – YourTutor – has been one of the most successful components of one of the BEESS-funded projects, the Transforming the Education Digital Supply Chain.

What are the best measures of success for international education?

- **Student progression and course completion rates.** International students who succeed in their courses, obtain strong marks, and graduate on time are the best advocates for Australia as a destination for tertiary learning.
- **Student experience.** Comprehensive student surveys would best determine the true nature of international students' experiences and also identify opportunities for improvement. Ideally these surveys would be administered uniformly by an independent organisation.
- **English language proficiency testing.** Periodic proficiency testing would hold both students and institutions accountable whilst ensuring that language skills remain a priority for all parties.

What are some case studies that best illustrate Australia's success? Please provide examples.

In the first half of 2015 YourTutor has delivered 6,500 hours of one-to-one online English language support for students across multiple geographies and time zones.

The accessible and convenient nature of the service has proven that there is significant student demand for personalised English language support that can be delivered at scale.

What would you like to see progressed as a priority for the strategy in the first year?

Strategic Goal 5.3 (Improving English language proficiency) should be expanded and prioritised for the reasons noted above.

Is there anything else you would like to raise that will help develop the final National Strategy for International Education?

Australia's international reputation will ultimately rise or fall based on the quality of the education it provides and the value for money it delivers. Excessive concern about international rankings is a distraction that could prove highly dangerous to the sector's future competitiveness. The Australian recently reported (10/06/15) that we have the most expensive tertiary system for international students and our international reputation is third, well behind the US and UK. Long-term success for Australia will require focusing on value, quality, and the student/customer experience, not the short-term revenue opportunities of each term's enrolments.