



Australian Library and
Information Association

Submission in response to the Draft National Strategy for International Education – April 2015

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ALIA contact:

Sue McKerracher, CEO, Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA),
9-11 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600

f 02 6215 8215 **m** 0404 456 749 **f** 02 6282 2249

w www.alia.org.au **e** sue.mckerracher@alia.org.au

1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

2. Introduction

This paper is submitted as feedback to the Australian Government *Draft National Strategy for International Education* April 2015. In it, we focus on three points:

1. Higher education and vocational education institutions are failing to recognise the current and potential contribution libraries and information resources can make to attracting international students.
2. An excellent international student experience can only be achieved if students have access to, and know how to effectively use, the latest information resources relating to their field of study.
3. Australian institutions' ability to compete with the best in terms of research requires a research infrastructure supported by libraries and library and information professionals.

3. How libraries can contribute to Australia's competitive advantage

In 2014, there were nearly 400,000 overseas students studying through Australian higher education and VET providers; 140,000 of them offshore.

We are holding our own in the world market, with a 5.5% share and strong support from Asia. However, there is strong competition from the US, UK and other nations, and while there are opportunities to expand our market share, for example in Latin America, we can only do so by offering an outstanding product that compares with the best, globally.

All nations competing in this arena focus on rankings, affordability, liveability, and it is hard to create a competitive advantage. As the Minister for Education and Training said in his foreword to the *Draft National Strategy* (page 1), 'We cannot lose sight of intensifying competition from the world's leading economies and emerging competition from universities and education hubs closer to home. Australia needs to meet this competition head on, with a relentless focus on quality in teaching, learning and research, to avoid being left behind.' And from page 7: 'Competition in all areas of education is intensifying as foreign governments and institutions invest heavily to improve their competitiveness and their student outcomes. While we have been highly successful in promoting the benefits and value of Australian qualifications, we face increasing competition from traditional and emerging international education players.'

With the gap between university offerings in different countries narrowing, as nations compete for overseas students, the value of quality campus libraries and library services for remote users has been underestimated as an attraction and a potential element of the

decision-making process. International students are some of the biggest users of library study (social) spaces. Physical libraries also increasingly act as a hub for learner-centred services. Showcase libraries are a highly visible symbol, clearly demonstrating the investment institutions are making in learning outcomes for students.

We propose that the Australian Government recognise this opportunity and actively encourage institutions to use flagship library premises and library resources as part of their international sales story.

We ask that library services be included in the new *Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching* (page 19).

4. Resources to support all relevant areas of study

If Australia is to fulfil its goal of excellence in STEM, for example, there must be investment in information resources to support the appropriate areas of study.

More than 80% of purchases for Australian higher education libraries are now in a digital format – e-journals, electronic databases, ebooks and so on. The move to 'e' has not reduced the cost of collection items; often, the cost has increased, as publishers struggle to find a financially sustainable model for licensing content to libraries.

Many of these electronic resources come from overseas suppliers and Australian library managers have to juggle with the vagaries of the AU dollar exchange rate. At the same time, their funding is being squeezed as part of the overall financial challenge facing tertiary education institutions.

In order to maximise the potential of libraries to support the international student experience, on campus and remotely, funding must be made available for the very latest resources and we ask the Australian Government to recognise this in its final report detailing the national strategy for international education.

5. Libraries' critical role in supporting research

If Australian universities are to achieve and maintain a global leadership position in research, libraries and library and information professionals must be recognised as playing a critical role supporting, for example, specialist research collections that attract researchers worldwide

Libraries contribute to the nation's increasing research mission by facilitating research through training, collections and technologically enriched and dedicated spaces for researchers and research students. Libraries partner with research and post-graduate offices, research institutes and centres in relation to compliance with regulatory data collection requirements (such as ERA), digital repositories, and new initiatives including e-research. There are new needs in the areas of collaborative technologies, authors' rights, scholarly publishing, and the institutional repositories that promote access to quality research papers from post-graduates and scholars.

Library funding is limited and geared to student numbers. Through participation in national cooperative schemes, post-graduate students have access to a wide collection of resources beyond one library's collection. However in an era of increasing access to licensed electronic material, this will not always fill the gaps in collections, particularly in some disciplines. While libraries aim to support all areas, with limited resources and current exchange rates, library purchasing power and ability to respond is severely hampered.

6. Summary

Library and information professionals welcome the opportunity to contribute to Australia's success in the field of international education and we are committed to providing an excellent student experience, whether the user is on campus or studying remotely.

We take this opportunity to emphasise how crucial the role of libraries are in attracting and retaining students because libraries are at the centre of their learning experiences by providing:

- Information online and physical resources and readings that are well targeted to their studies
- A pleasant and welcoming place of study and learning including the provision of computing and printing and copying
- Assistance to students with their studies through excellent advice and support, assisting with (lifelong) research and enquiry skills.

By offering excellent services libraries are a major contributor to the long term viability of transnational education.

In order to maximise the potential of libraries to support the international student experience, on campus and remotely, funding must be made available for the very latest resources and we ask the Australian Government to recognise this in its final report detailing the national strategy for international education.