

# Exploring the Pulse of Higher Education Internationalisation in Australia:

## From Metrics to Meaningful Engagement

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**Project Report**

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# Executive Summary

## Overview

As Australia's universities recalibrate their international strategies post-pandemic, understanding their approaches to internationalisation has gained new urgency. In this study, we examined how Australian universities currently conceptualise and implement internationalisation in higher education. Specifically, explored (a) the ways universities have recently described their international strategies and (b) the importance that various stakeholders place on key internationalisation strategies. In doing so, we sought to capture “the pulse” of Australian higher education internationalisation and identify the future directions in which it might move. The study was conducted in two phases in 2022-2023. First, a desktop review was conducted that analysed universities’ public facing international strategies. Then, a short survey explored student, staff, and expert perspectives ( $n = 258$ ) on key strategies and approaches to university internationalisation.

## Key Findings

Our findings highlight that Australia has come a long way in their approaches to internationalisation, shifting from a historic focus on mobility practices to a broader, comprehensive approach that emphasises international curriculum and enhanced teaching and learning. Our research shows that stakeholders—both staff and students—prioritise internationalisation of the curriculum and cross-cultural interactions as crucial elements of an 'internationalised university'. While comprehensive approaches are not new in Australian higher education, this explicit focus on pedagogical transformation marks a significant evolution in institutional strategy. The following key findings emerged from this study:

### 1. Expanded conceptualisations of internationalisation

Australian universities have broadened their internationalisation agenda beyond student recruitment to encompass comprehensive strategies across multiple domains. These strategies integrate both internal dimensions, such as embedding global perspectives in curricula, and external activities like expanding international partnerships. This shift reflects a more mature understanding of internationalisation that spans teaching, learning, research, and institutional partnerships.

### 2. Broadened conceptualisations of diversity

Universities have evolved their understanding of diversity beyond simply counting the international students on campus. Their strategies recognise multiple dimensions of diversity, encompassing staff and student backgrounds, local community composition, and intersecting characteristics including socioeconomic status, language, culture, religion, gender, and First Nations identity. When international student diversity is mentioned in strategies, it is also typically framed as one component within broader institutional diversity goals, with an emphasis on recruiting students from varied backgrounds and regions.

### 3. A small but growing focus on the global-local relationship

Our data suggests that Australian universities increasingly recognise the importance of "glocalisation"—connecting global engagement with local community impact—yet few explicitly integrate this approach into their international strategies. This gap is notable given that some student responses specifically called for incorporating both multicultural and local Australian perspectives into curricula.

### 4. A focus on teaching and learning

The alignment between stakeholder priorities and institutional strategies is evident in their shared emphasis on teaching and learning outcomes. Both staff and students prioritise developing cultural competencies and embedding global content in curricula. This teaching and learning focus is reflected in university strategies through initiatives targeting curricular offerings, experiential learning, and measurable learning outcomes.

## 5. Support rather than recruitment

A clear shift is evident in how universities prioritise international student engagement. Rather than emphasising recruitment, institutions and survey respondents focus more on supporting international students and enhancing their educational experience. This aligns with broader institutional goals of meaningful diversification and student success.

## Recommendations

Our analysis identified a few clear areas for further development in universities' international strategies, including the following key recommendations:

### 1. Individualise and contextualise strategies to reflect institutional identity and context

Our findings show that Australian universities often adopt similar internationalisation approaches that fail to leverage their distinctive strengths and local contexts. To address this, institutions could develop unique strategies that reflect their specific characteristics, students, and communities. Rather than using generic terms like "global citizenship," universities could define concrete cultural competencies and establish clear pathways between international initiatives and graduate outcomes. To increase efficacy, these distinctive approaches would need tailored metrics that measure success against institutional values and community needs.

### 2. Strengthen global-local connections

While international strategies often prioritise global visibility, significant value also lies in meaningful local impact. There is much opportunity for Australian universities to expand their international strategies to consider this global-local relationship more fully. For example, universities could integrate their global engagement with community needs, using international partnerships strategically to address local challenges. This includes creating opportunities for international students to meaningfully contribute to host communities and ensuring that global initiatives deliver tangible benefits to domestic students and regional stakeholders.

### 3. Transform curriculum and pedagogy

Student and staff participants highlighted the importance of building relevant skills and competences and of embedding global perspectives into the curriculum. However, offering relevant programs as electives and/or within informal curricula is unlikely to prompt widespread success of these initiatives; rather, global perspectives need to be embedded systematically across all university programs. This requires investing in professional development to help staff internationalise their curricula and create inclusive teaching approaches that leverage classroom diversity. Likewise, universities could develop assessment practices that measure international learning outcomes and ensure that both virtual and physical international experiences are accessible to all students. An institution-wide approach to curriculum transformation is essential for achieving meaningful internationalisation outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that the so-called internationalisation of Australian universities often ignores the history of colonialisation, that Australia has been home to Aboriginal people for hundreds of thousands of years, and that this land was never ceded.

We also acknowledge that *internationalisation* is both a broad and contested term. We conducted this study to explore how it is conceptualised in practice and how associated strategies are valued by staff and students.

We thank Douglas Proctor for his guidance at the start of the project. We appreciate our colleagues' assistance in sharing the survey with their peers and students. We also thank the students, staff, and experts who responded to our survey.

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# Study Approach

This study emerged out of a post-COVID higher education landscape in which global mobility was severely restricted. Internationalisation of higher education, although historically a broad concept, had often been associated with inward mobility, in particular of international students (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Rumbley, 2015). With that practice significantly compromised and the future of mobility opportunities unknown, we wanted to better understand how universities could approach their international strategies amid this changing landscape.

In addition, it is also important to note that internationalisation is a contested term and controversial concept (see Brewer & Leask, 2012; de Wit & Jones, 2018; Sperduti, 2019). We therefore approached this study with a purposefully undefined conceptualisation of what internationalisation entailed and we explicitly aimed to investigate how universities themselves described their international or global strategies. In addition, in the survey, we focused on the more specific strategies that have tended to comprise various international approaches, rather than the terms that may or may not be associated with them.

In addition, this study was focused on elements of internationalisation that most directly affect the student experience of internationalisation. Elements of finance and governance were out of scope, for example, but they are an integral part of the inner workings of each institution and that institution's ability to offer an internationalised learning experience for its students.

The study was conducted in two phases. First, a desktop review was conducted to identify the practices that have recently comprised Australian universities' internationalisation strategies. Second, a short survey was conducted to investigate stakeholder perspectives on key university internationalisation strategies. Combined, these two collections of data provided a snapshot of the recent approaches to and ideas about university internationalisation, referred to here as the "pulse" of higher education internationalisation in Australia. Each phase is described in more detail below.

## Desktop Review

The desktop review addressed two specific research questions: "How do Australian universities describe their internationalisation approaches?" and, more specifically, "What practices have recently comprised universities' internationalisation approaches?"

### Identifying Key Documents

To address these questions, we searched for each university's most recent "key document" that outlined their strategies or approaches related to internationalisation. Because we were interested in how a university described its internationalisation approach, the target document was ideally one entirely specific to internationalisation, such as a university's Global Strategy or International Strategy. Internationalisation-related strategies embedded within larger university strategy documents would not serve this purpose; however, they were considered in a separate step of the analysis in order to understand the broader context of university internationalisation. Likewise, internal-facing documents were out of scope for this study.

A public-facing, internationalisation-specific document was identified for 18 universities. These 18 documents represented the most recent publicly available documents at the time of the search, and 10 were current at the time of the search (i.e., those strategies that covered 2022 or later). The remaining 8 were advertised as strategies for previous years (e.g., 2015-2020) but comprised the most recent publicly available document. An updated document was not identified. Strategic documents often require multiple stages in their development; it is likely that these 8 universities were in the process of developing newer strategies or that they have published updated documents since the time of our search. As such, the 18 internationalisation-specific documents, referred to as the "key documents", portrayed the most recent picture of universities' approaches and comprised the sample for this desktop review. See Appendix A for the final sample of key documents identified.

## Analysis

The 18 key documents were each coded against a pre-determined coding tree that comprised 11 strategic categories and 86 specific strategy codes. The coding tree included all internationalisation-related activities identified in previous Australian higher education literature and strategies identified in previous frameworks (e.g., Arkoudis et al., 2012; Gao, 2018; Hudzik, 2011; Krause et al., 2005). We revised and calibrated the coding tree by first reviewing two of the key documents and ensuring that the codebook comprehensively considered all identified strategies. See Appendix B for the final list of coding categories. We then formally coded all 18 key documents using a binary coding system that identified if a document mentioned a particular strategy. We did not note how frequently a particular strategy was mentioned in each document, only if it was present.

## Survey

A small, electronic survey was conducted to assess staff, student, and expert attitudes toward key strategies identified in the desktop review described above and in previous scholarly literature. It asked, “How do staff and students perceive the value of key internationalisation approaches?” The survey was created using the online survey tool Qualtrics. The main question asked participants to rank seven key strategies in order of importance as they would characterise their “ideal university”. Staff and expert participants were then asked (a) to identify how difficult they believed it would be for Australian universities to incorporate each of those same strategies on a scale of 1 to 5, and (b) what “higher education internationalisation” should be renamed. Students’ follow-up question was open-ended and asked them for one idea that they thought Australian universities should adopt in relation to their global or international strategies. All participants were then asked to share any other additional thoughts, if relevant.

To reduce the over-surveying burden on students and staff, only a minimal amount of demographic data was collected, including the type of course a student was enrolled in (e.g., undergraduate or graduate) and if the staff member’s work directly related to internationalisation. All participants who completed the survey were given the option of entering a draw to win one of 20 Prezzy vouchers, each worth \$100. Human research ethics approval was received from the University of Melbourne (ethics project ID: 23603).

## Participants

Participants were recruited through a range of means, including through networks of university leaders (e.g., PVCs International), the national student union, and international student associations. Colleagues at multiple universities were also contacted and asked to share the survey notice with their students if suitable. Any student enrolled in an Australian university was eligible to participate.

A total of 226 people responded to the survey, including 203 students, 53 university staff, and 2 experts not employed by a particular university. Table 1 shows the profile of survey participants. There was a relatively even balance between students in undergraduate (43% of student participants) and graduate coursework (48% of student participants) programs. A small percentage were enrolled in research degrees (7%) or non-award programs (1%). Students from five universities were represented; however, the vast majority (98%) of student participants came from one institution. Of the 203 students who completed the survey, 152 responded to the open-ended question described above.

The staff participant profile was more diverse. Staff from 16 universities completed the survey, with half (53%) from the main institution, 9% from a second, 8% from a third, 6% from a fourth, 4% from a fifth, and less than 2% from each of the remaining 11 universities represented. As such, the majority of all survey participants (88%) represented one institution. This imbalance is addressed in the analysis and in the representation of findings. To see all universities represented by survey participants, see Appendix D.

**Table 1. Survey participant profile overview**

	<i>n</i>	% of students ( <i>n</i> = 203)	% of staff and experts ( <i>n</i> = 55)	% of total ( <i>n</i> = 258)
Student	203			79%
Staff	53			21%
Expert	2			<1%
<b>Course type</b>				
Non-award	4	2%		2%
Undergraduate (e.g., Bachelor's)	87	43%		34%
Graduate coursework (e.g., master's by coursework)	97	48%		38%
Graduate research (e.g., master's by research, PhD, etc.)	15	7%		6%
<b>Role category</b>				
An academic staff member	17		31%	7%
A professional or administrative staff member	28		51%	11%
A university leadership position (e.g., Dean, Assistant Dean, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, etc.)	8		15%	3%
An expert in the higher education internationalisation (or related), not employed as an academic at a university	2		4%	<1%
<b>Role related to internationalisation?</b>				
Yes	23		42%	9%
No	30		55%	12%

## Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to gather a picture of participants' attitudes, using a combination of Excel and Qualtrics internal analysis tools. Responses were collated into two groups: student participants and staff/expert participants. Chi-squared tests were used to consider any associations between staff roles and their responses, e.g., differences between those staff whose roles related to internationalisation or not, and then between those in academic, professional, or leadership positions. Comparisons were not made across institutions, year levels, disciplines, or gender.

The ranking question was analysed using the internal Qualtrics analysis tool to establish the rank order across both groups of collated responses (student responses and staff/expert responses). Rank order was determined by the converse of the mean score, with 1.0 indicating a unanimous ranking of first and 7.0 a unanimous ranking of last. As such, the strategy with the lowest mean was ranked as "most important". Variance was also considered.

Student open-ended responses (*n* = 152) with suggestions for strategies that universities should adopt were coded through a combined iterative and deductive approach. A practice phase involved a joint coding session of a random allocation of 19 responses. This process allowed for familiarisation with and mutual understanding of the coding tree. The formal coding process comprised two researchers each independently coding 30-40 responses and Author 1 calculating agreement (a) between the two coders and (b) between the coders and herself. The team clarified codes, resolved any disagreement, and agreed on keywords for certain codes. This process was repeated for the remaining sets of responses.

After the last set of responses was coded and reviewed by the team, Author 2 transposed all agreed upon decisions onto a spreadsheet in which a binary system was used to document the presence of each code, with "1" indicating that a code was present and a blank indicating that it was not. Frequency of an idea *within* a response was not noted; it was either present or not. A participant's response might have included multiple

suggestions, and each suggestion was coded separately. The codes were therefore not mutually exclusive, and the number of codes identified is larger than the number of participant responses.

Staff and expert suggestions for renaming internationalisation were analysed thematically using an iterative thematic coding process.

Patterns across all questions and phases were then discussed and key findings identified.

# Findings

## Desktop Review Results

### Overview of desktop review findings

Here we report the main overarching patterns identified through the desktop review. The key documents suggest that Australian universities have utilised comprehensive approaches to internationalisation that included a range of different strategic areas. The key documents for five universities explicitly stated that their approach was “comprehensive” or that it comprised “whole of university” strategy. Most documents (84%, n=15) comprised nine or more strategic categories and each of the 11 strategic categories was identified in at least half of the key documents.

Specifically, all key documents mentioned strategies related to (a) teaching and learning, (b) students and the student experience, (c) staff skills and characteristics, and (d) global networks and partnerships. All but one key document (n=17) also mentioned (e) graduate outcomes and (f) research. For more detailed discussion of the four most common categories of approaches, see Marangell, Cai, and Dollinger (2024).

The most frequently identified individual strategies related to the following:

- establishing global partnerships (100%),
- including international research collaborations specifically (89%),
- exchange opportunities (83%),
- adding global perspectives to the material (83%), and
- recruiting and/or having international students (78%).

### Expanding conceptualisations

Findings suggest that Australian universities have expanded their conceptualisations of internationalisation. This impression is based on the more comprehensive range of strategies present in most of the key documents that we analysed. Previously, international strategies seemed to focus on recruiting international students, international reputation/ranking, and/or expanding international campuses and experiences. In this study, we observed a wider range of strategies that included both internal strategies such as globally relevant curriculum and graduate outcomes, and external strategies such as reputation and global partnerships. Strategic documents included, for example, approaches related to teaching and learning, expanding the diversity of the student population, staff recruitment, community integration, reputation building, curriculum offerings (locally and overseas), and partnerships with other universities in the region, among others.

In addition, conceptualisations of diversity were also noticeably more comprehensive. The key documents focused on the diversity of their university community more broadly, rather than on, for example, the recruitment of international students as the primary diversification measure. Some strategies mentioned the diversity of their local community but more often a document focused on diversity of the student population or of students and staff together.

## A focus on the formal curriculum

Our analysis also highlighted a common focus on the student experience and teaching and learning, in particular. For example, two of the most frequently identified individual strategies related to curricular offerings: (a) expanding exchange and international opportunities and (b) including global perspectives and contexts in curricula material, each of which was mentioned in 83% of the key documents. This was a noticeable shift away from a previous focus on the informal curriculum and on extracurricular opportunities.

## Quantitative measures present but less visible

It was less common than anticipated for documents to mention quantitative measures. For example, recruiting international students was mentioned in most documents (78%) but less regularly than other approaches. Likewise, references to a university's ranking or reputation (found in 78% of documents) were also less visible than expected. However, both approaches were indeed still present, indicating that external drivers of internationalisation persist.

## Other universities' strategies

Additional analysis was done to further investigate the internationalisation approaches of the 21 universities for which a key document was not identified. In this aim, we reviewed the content of their overall university strategy document for any reference to internationalisation-related aims. These were considered "embedded strategies", i.e., internationalisation-related strategies embedded within the university's overall strategic plan.

All 21 remaining universities had some type of internationalisation-related strategy mentioned within their overall university strategy, 19 of which were current through 2022 and two of which were out of date. Specifically, all 21 embedded strategies included reference to internationalisation-related aims for (a) global partnerships and networks, (b) teaching and learning, (c) graduate outcomes, and (d) research. Over 90% referenced internationalisation-related aims for (a) staff skills and characteristics, (b) students and the student experience, (c) globalisation or regionalisation, and (d) institutional reputation. See Appendix C for the other strategies identified within embedded strategies.

It was one aim of this study to explore how universities defined their internationalisation approaches, and these embedded strategies were therefore ill-suited for that purpose. More detailed analysis was thus not conducted on these documents. The prominent presence of these embedded strategies, however, confirms the continued strategic importance of internationalisation within the Australian higher education sector.

## Survey Results

Survey results suggest a focus on embedding internationalisation into the formal curriculum. This was visible in both staff/expert and student responses.

### Rankings

There was much agreement between staff and students about the strategies that should be prioritised in an "ideal" university. For example, both staff and students identified the same top three strategies: increasing students' cultural competencies and skills, embedding global/international content into curricula, and supporting international students.

The only two strategies with different ranking between staff and students were two that related more directly to the respective group: students ranked exchange and international study opportunities fourth while staff ranked it last; staff ranked having international staff fourth while students ranked it last. This is perhaps not surprising. Generally speaking, the similarities far outshine the differences. However, there was much variation within the participant groups. For example, as shown in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively.

Table 2, each strategy was ranked both first and last by individual participants. A more detailed breakdown of the percentage of students and staff/expert participants allocating each rank to each strategy can be found in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively.

**Table 2. The importance of seven key strategies, as ranked by students and staff/experts**

Strategy	Student responses ( <i>n</i> = 203)			Staff and expert responses ( <i>n</i> = 55)		
	Ranking	Mean rank (out of 7)	Variance	Ranking	Mean rank (out of 7)	Variance
Increasing students' cultural competencies and skills	1	2.65	2.97	1	2.91	3.32
Embedding global/international content into curricula	2	3.2	3.79	2	3.22	3.92
Supporting international students	3	3.26	2.89	3	3.73	3.11
Offering exchange/international study opportunities	4	4.34	3.85	5	4.45	3.27
Recruiting/having international students on campus	5	4.51	2.74	4	4.13	3.49
Expanding international research collaborations	6	4.67	3.69	6	4.78	4.86
Recruiting/having international staff	7	5.36	2.36	6	4.78	2.72

**Table 3. Percentage of students (*n* = 203) who allocated each rank to each strategy.**

Strategy		Rank						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Embedding global/international content into curricula	%	24%	22%	17%	10%	10%	7%	9%
Increasing students' cultural competencies and skills	%	35%	23%	15%	7%	9%	9%	1%
Supporting international students	%	19%	18%	22%	18%	11%	8%	4%
Recruiting/having international students on campus	%	5%	8%	12%	22%	20%	21%	11%
Recruiting/having international staff	%	1%	5%	7%	9%	26%	22%	30%
Offering exchange/international study opportunities	%	9%	13%	15%	15%	12%	17%	19%
Expanding international research collaborations	%	7%	10%	12%	18%	13%	15%	25%

**Table 4. Percentage of staff and experts (n=55) who allocated each rank to each strategy.**

Strategy	Rank							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Embedding global/international content into curricula	%	27%	15%	20%	13%	9%	5%	11%
Increasing students' cultural competencies and skills	%	27%	27%	11%	15%	7%	7%	5%
Supporting international students	%	11%	20%	18%	13%	16%	18%	4%
Recruiting/having international students on campus	%	13%	11%	9%	25%	13%	18%	11%
Recruiting/having international staff	%	2%	7%	20%	7%	29%	15%	20%
Offering exchange/international study opportunities	%	5%	11%	18%	16%	11%	24%	15%
Expanding international research collaborations	%	15%	9%	4%	11%	15%	13%	35%

### Ease of implementing each strategy, as perceived by staff respondents

Staff and expert participants ( $n = 54$ ) indicated that most of these strategies would be relatively easy to implement. Specifically, the medians and the means for each of these seven strategies range between 2.0 and 3.0, which would equate to something between somewhat easy and neither easy nor difficult for each.

All seven strategies were generally considered on average to be somewhat easy or neither easy nor difficult. Recruiting international students was considered somewhat/extremely easy by the largest percentage of staff (63%) and half of staff participants (52%) felt that it would be somewhat or extremely easy to support international students (see Table 5). On the other hand, increasing students' cultural competencies and skills was the element considered somewhat/extremely difficult by the largest percentage of respondents (43%).

Of the three strategies that staff and students ranked as the most important, supporting international students received the highest percentage of staff saying that it would be somewhat or extremely easy to do, which, as mentioned above, was noted by half of staff respondents. On the other hand, the other two strategies identified as the most important (increasing students' cultural competencies and skills and embedding global/international content into curricula) were considered somewhat/extremely difficult by the largest percentage of staff respondents (43% and 33%, respectively). Less than one third said the same of the remaining five strategies.

Overall, staff responses were consistent; both the medians and means for each of these seven strategies ranged between 2.0 and 3.0, which would equate to something between somewhat easy and neither easy nor difficult for each. Chi-squared tests indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between those whose work related to internationalisation and those whose work does not. Likewise, there were no statistically significant differences between respondents in academic, professional, and leadership positions.

**Table 5. Ease of implementing each strategy, as perceived by staff respondents**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Perceived ease</b>	<b>Total (n = 54)</b>
Embedding global/international content into curricula	Somewhat/Extremely difficult	33%
	Neither easy nor difficult	19%
	Somewhat/Extremely easy	48%
Increasing students' cultural competencies and skills	Somewhat/Extremely difficult	43%
	Neither easy nor difficult	17%
	Somewhat/Extremely easy	41%
Supporting international students	Somewhat/Extremely difficult	24%
	Neither easy nor difficult	24%
	Somewhat/Extremely easy	52%
Recruiting/having international students on campus	Somewhat/Extremely difficult	11.1%
	Neither easy nor difficult	26%
	Somewhat/Extremely easy	63%
Recruiting/having international staff	Somewhat/Extremely difficult	28%
	Neither easy nor difficult	26%
	Somewhat/Extremely easy	46%
Offering exchange/international study opportunities	Somewhat/Extremely difficult	20%
	Neither easy nor difficult	24%
	Somewhat/Extremely easy	56%
Expanding international research collaborations	Somewhat/Extremely difficult	24%
	Neither easy nor difficult	32%
	Somewhat/Extremely easy	44%

**Note 1.** Due to rounding, percentages do not necessarily add to 100.

### Students' suggestions for what universities should adopt

An open-ended question asked students, "What is one idea that you think Australian universities should adopt in relation to their global or international strategies?" Of the 203 student participants who completed the survey, 152 responded to this question.

As Table 6 shows, students' open-ended responses primarily included suggestions related to the student experience (36%) and internationalisation of the curriculum (30%), which was understandably similar to their ranking of key strategies. However, a closer look revealed interesting differences in how the two questions were answered. The prompt about the "ideal university" elicited prioritisation of two curricular-focused strategies (increasing students' cultural competencies and skills and embedding global/international content into curricula); yet, the question about what universities "should" adopt resulted in more focus on supporting international students (e.g., to "look after" international students).

Specifically, students suggested that universities should adopt practices that better support students, with support for international students receiving particular attention. Examples of student support areas included financial assistance (e.g., "More scholarships given to international students"), mental health support (e.g., "Offering international students support via mental health services"), career advice and employment opportunities (e.g., "They should give more work/career opportunities for international students"), and overall transition and adjustment to studying in Australia (e.g., "support for international students in Australia from first year to graduation").

Additionally, students' responses also mentioned teaching and learning strategies, such as increasing exchange and internship opportunities. These responses suggest that students valued strategies that enhance their learning capabilities, knowledge, and skills in an international/global context, such as in the following quote: "I feel that Australian universities should encourage the broadening of one's world view by encouraging students to study abroad or engage with a community that's different from theirs."

Other comments related to staff skills and characteristics (3%), glocalisation or regionalisation (3%), and university finances (1%). Another 1% of participants provided a comment but not a suggestion.

**Table 6. Categories of students' responses about what universities should adapt in relation to their global strategies.**

Category	Subcategory	% of participants (n = 152)	Example
<b>Students and the student experience</b>		36%	
	International student support	18%	"Better support systems for international students."
	Financial support and policies	9%	"Reduce international student's fees."
<b>Teaching and learning</b>		31%	
	Exchanges and internships	14%	"Provide more overseas study opportunities such as exchange, summer program."
	Global content	8%	"Create content contrasting the Australian approach with the approach in other countries and jurisdictions."
	Language learning	6%	"Opportunities for learning languages from across the world and easier access to this."
<b>Partnerships</b>		11%	"How to learn from and collaborate with other countries in pursuit of being more sustainable."
<b>Community</b>		11%	
	Celebrate diversity	5%	"Cultural events could assist in helping to [support] a larger international understanding and general knowledge"
<b>Research</b>		7%	
	International research collaboration	5%	"Australian universities should explore to offer more opportunities to seek collaboration with those in the global and international community in sharing ideas, research and working on projects."
<b>Graduate outcomes</b>		6%	
	Cultural awareness	5%	"Encourage more cross-cultural competency by including more language and cultural study options."
<b>University reputation</b>		5%	"Increase its international reputation."

**Note 2.** This table includes categories and subcategories mentioned by at least 5% of respondents.

Students were also asked, "What other thoughts would you like to share about the strategies above and/or the future of Australia higher education internationalisation?" Of the 203 student participants who completed the survey, 93 provided suggestions for the future of Australian higher education internationalisation. Students' suggestions were classified inductively into five areas: university-level approaches (34%), curriculum (27%), student services support (25%), greater higher education context (22%) and extracurricular events (12%) (see Table 7).

The responses related to university-level approaches share similarities with the main categories of partnership and research mentioned above. Suggestions in these categories included collaboration and partnership with international universities, such as "more opportunities for intercultural exchange and joint research projects". The second most frequent suggestions referred to curriculum and teaching, similar to the focus on teaching and learning in students' suggestions mentioned above. Most responses in this category referred to promoting international study programs, enhancing opportunities for international exchange, study and internship, such as in this quote: "Encouraging local students to become involved in opportunities abroad, such as in research and study".

**Table 7. Categories of students' responses (n = 93) to the question, "What other thoughts would you like to share about the strategies above and/or the future of Australia higher education internationalisation?"**

Themes	n (participants)	% of participants (n = 93)	Illustrative quote
<b>University-level approaches</b>	32	34	"To enhance collaboration between Australian universities and other international universities"
<b>Curriculum/pedagogy</b>	25	27	"Look for ways in the courses for the students to further interact with the material and explore further in depth"
<b>Student services and support</b>	23	25	"Universities should support international students"
<b>Greater context/The higher education sector</b>	20	22	"International students have a lot of options now across North America, Europe, Australia and Asia. I personally chose Australia because it's a western country and it's not as expensive as the USA, I think at the height of this inflation and economic crisis, Australian universities should keep seeking ways to keep costs lower, not increase them and pass them on to foreign students. Otherwise in my opinion, Australia will lose that competitive edge where it's not as expensive as the US"
<b>Extracurricular events and experiences</b>	11	12	"Have a room or theatre that's always open for those who want to actively socialise within campus"

### Staff suggestions for renaming internationalisation

Given the controversial and contested nature of the term *internationalisation*, staff and expert respondents were asked, "If 'higher education internationalisation' were to be renamed, what do you think it should be called instead?" Of the 55 staff and experts who completed the survey, 36 responded to this question. Key themes and responses are identified Table 8 below.

The largest proportion of these responses (42%) suggest a shift to using "global" or "world" rather than "international" (e.g., "higher education globalisation" or "global higher education"). These suggestions have connotations of a wider community of learning and of mutual goals, rather than a focus on crossing borders. Perhaps they also relate to ideas of being part of the global community, of global citizenship, and of being aware of global topics, contexts, and happenings. Interestingly, multiple suggestions referred explicitly to

“globalisation” which contrasts much recent literature that has criticised the associations between internationalisation, globalisation, and perceptions that Western approaches to education are best (e.g., Brewer & Leask, 2012; Sperduti, 2019).

On the other hand, a few responses (14%) gave suggestions that focused explicitly on connections across borders, cultures, or institutions. Instead of focusing on individual mobility, these suggestions focus on a network of interconnected institutions, opportunities, and goals. Other responses focused on the development of cross-cultural skills (14%) or on the elements of diversity, diverse perspectives, and diverse contexts (8%). Interestingly, two participants felt internationalisation should be an inherent part of higher education and therefore did not need its own name.

**Table 8. Themes and responses from staff/experts (n = 36) for renaming internationalisation of higher education**

Theme	n (participants)	% of 36 participants	Description	Response examples
<b>"Global" rather than "international"</b>	15		"International" should be replaced by "global", "world", or similar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher education globalisation</li> <li>Globalisation</li> <li>Global education</li> <li>Global Tertiary Education</li> <li>Global higher education</li> <li>worldwide higher education</li> <li>world education</li> <li>higher education global dimensions</li> </ul>
<b>Connectedness and experience focused</b>	5	14%	The name should focus on connectedness, collaboration, or exchange opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achieving a cross-national education</li> <li>global education opportunities</li> <li>Global tertiary interconnectedness</li> <li>Globally connected universities</li> <li>Global collaboration and cultural exchange in higher education</li> </ul>
<b>Competency or attribute focused</b>	5	14%	The term should focus on crosscultural competencies, skills, or similar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cross cultural awareness in higher education</li> <li>intercultural competency</li> <li>Global Competency (GQ)</li> <li>"interculturalisation?? intercultural awareness??"</li> <li>International citizenship</li> </ul>
<b>No change</b>	4	11%	No change to the name should be made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no change</li> <li>"I think it should stay as 'internationalisation' - it's clear as is"</li> <li>"I think 'internationalisation' of higher education adequately captures it, given the multidimensional nature of the concept and activities"</li> <li>internationalising higher education</li> </ul>
<b>Diversity focused</b>	3	8%	The term should focus on elements of diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Global Diversification of Higher Education</li> <li>Dealing with diversity - global perspectives &amp; global markets</li> <li>Global contextualisation of higher education</li> </ul>
<b>It should not need a name</b>	2	6%	The concept should be inherent to higher education and therefore should not need its own name	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher education</li> <li>"I think it should be an intrinsic part of higher education. The fact we even have to call it something reflects mainstream parochial thinking in Australia."</li> </ul>
<b>Unsure</b>	2	6%	No suggestion provided; unsure how to answer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not sure</li> <li>"Not sure but it certainly would benefit from a rename as it's hard to tell what it represents at first glance"</li> </ul>

# Conclusion

The overarching purpose of this study was to better understand opportunities for the future of Australian university' international strategies, and findings from this study suggest the following potential priorities:

- Expanding opportunities for all students to engage in international, intercultural, or overseas experiences through the formal or informal curriculum.
- Supporting students' experiences of internationalisation, especially those from underrepresented or diverse backgrounds.
- Embedding development of internationally relevant skills, competencies, and knowledge into the formal curriculum.
- Developing distinctive international university strategies in ways that embrace, highlight, and engage with the particular diversities and cultures within their communities.
- Focusing on enhancing experiences of internationalisation through community building rather than metrics.

Our analysis shows that university conceptualisations of internationalisation are shifting away from mobility as the primary focus, aligning more closely with comprehensive approaches advocated by scholars (e.g., Beelen & Jones, 2015; Knight & de Wit, 2018; Leask, 2009). The expanding descriptions of diversity also mirror recent literature, including Australian university students' nuanced descriptions (Baker et al., 2022) and within international findings (Marangell et al., 2024). These changes signal positive movement toward institution-specific understandings of diversity.

Participants' rankings indicate that staff and students prioritise the strategies that would create a globally relevant learning experience—and outcomes—for all students. Previous studies (e.g., Marangell, 2020) have suggested that most, if not all strategies, are considered important to some extent. The phrasing in this study is therefore important in helping to *prioritise* approaches. Ranking the importance of seven strategies as participants would characterise their "ideal university" indicates not what should be fixed but what should be *valued*; in other words, not what *needs* attention but what *deserves* attention. It seems therefore that the strategies that support and enrich students' learning experiences are the ones deemed most deserving of attention going forward.

Several limitations warrant consideration. As a pilot study, our sample primarily represented one metropolitan research-intensive university, limiting generalisability across the Australian higher education sector. The small sample size precluded statistical comparisons and detailed analysis of associations across variables and participant groups. Additionally, while this study focused on student experience aspects of internationalisation, important elements of finance and governance—which are integral to institutions' capacity to deliver internationalised learning experiences—remained outside its scope.

In sum, these findings reveal a significant evolution in how Australian universities conceptualise and implement internationalisation. The shift from mobility-focused approaches to comprehensive strategies that emphasise curriculum transformation, student experience, and community engagement represents meaningful progress. However, institutions must now focus on developing distinctive approaches that reflect their unique contexts, strengthen local-global connections, and systematically embed international perspectives across all programs. By prioritising these elements, universities can move beyond surface-level internationalisation to create meaningful, inclusive, and sustainable global learning environments that benefit all students and their communities.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A. Final sample of key documents identified in desktop review.

University	Key Document
Australian Catholic University	ACU Global Strategy 2020-2023
Charles Darwin University	Challenging Global Conventions, Strategic Plan – CDU Global 2015-2025
Charles Sturt University	The Internationalisation Strategy (-2015)
Central Queensland University	International Transnational Education Policy (effective Aug 2021)
Griffith University	Internationalisation Strategy 2018-2020
James Cook University	International Engagement Strategy 2025
La Trobe University	Globalisation Plan 2018-2022
RMIT University	The International Plan (2016-2020)
University of Adelaide	International Plan (published Dec 2020)
University of Melbourne	International Strategy 2017-2020
University of Notre Dame Australia	International Student and Engagement Strategic Plan 2015-2018
University of Queensland	Global Strategy (log-in required)
University of Southern Queensland	USQ International Strategy 2020-2024
University of Tasmania	International Strategy 2016 – 2020
University of Technology Sydney	UTS International Strategy 2021–2025
University of the Sunshine Coast	Internationalisation Guidelines
University of Wollongong	Internationalisation in UOW Performance Portfolio (Feb 2007)
Western Sydney University	Alignment of Global Futures: Internationalising Western Sydney University 2015-2020

## Appendix B. Category and code frequencies in 18 key documents.

The below table includes the categories and codes identified in at least one of the specific documents.

Category/Code	n (university)	% of 18	Description
<b>Teaching and learning</b>	18	100	Strategies that focus on formal teaching and learning experiences, including opportunities domestically and overseas. These references often focus on what students will learn but some references also mention how and where they will learn.
Exchange/Studying abroad/International experiences	15	83	
Adding global perspectives/context in the material	15	83	
Internship opportunities	11	61	
Teaching quality, general	10	56	
Curricular support (programs)	9	50	
International campuses/location/programs	9	50	
<b>Students and student experience</b>	18	100	
Specific reference to recruiting/having international students	14	78	
Reference to student diversity	12	67	
Student recruitment, general	12	67	
Equity/access/pathway programs	10	56	
Improve the student experience, general	10	56	
<b>Staff skills and characteristics</b>	18	100	This category includes strategies that mention university staff (whether academic or professional). References are often made to who staff are or where they come from. Often, this is referred to as a direct influence on the student experience.
Increase staff skills/awareness/staff development	12	67	
Staff diversity	8	44	
Staff mobility	8	44	
Staff recruitment	6	33	
Staff, other	6	33	
<b>Global partnerships and networks</b>	18	100	This group of strategies focuses on the university's partnerships and networks, often mentioning an aim to expand those partnerships or to better leverage them.
Global networks/partnerships, general	18	100	
With alumni/alumni engagement/networks	13	72	
With other universities	11	61	
With industry/industry engagement	10	56	
Engagement outcomes, general	8	44	
<b>Graduate outcomes</b>	17	94	These strategies focus on the attributes and learning outcomes of the university's graduates, including attitudes, characteristics, and skills. Most do not seem to be measured formally but strategies described their intentions for the types of graduates they will foster (e.g., inclusive, culturally competent, etc.).
Readiness for global market/jobs/employability	13	72	
ICC-related competence/communication/awareness	10	56	
Global citizenship	6	33	
Graduate outcomes, other	5	28	
Multiple/global perspectives	4	22	
Graduate outcomes, general	4	22	
<b>Research</b>	17	94	Strategies in this category highlight research as a key avenue through which universities will focus their international efforts, often through expanding research collaborations. Other efforts include building the renown of the research, its strengths, capacities, or innovation.
International research collaborations/networks	16	89	
Strengthen research impacts/capacity	10	56	
Research, general	9	50	
World-leading research and/or innovation	8	44	
Research Reputation	7	39	
<b>Reputation</b>	14	78	These strategies identify a university's reputation as important to their efforts, whether by expanding it, improving it, or maintaining it. Sometimes the university's international ranking is mentioned specifically; other times a vague reference to "impact" or "reputation" is made instead.
Reputation, general (e.g., "global profile", world leader)	12	67	
Ranking	8	44	
Global impact, unspecified	6	33	
<b>Glocalisation/Regionalisation</b>	14	78	

Category/Code	n (university)	% of 18	Description
To benefit local communities/mutual benefit w/ the region	10	56	References noted in this category focus on the local effects and influences of global efforts. They discuss the relationship between the university and the local community, the university's global efforts and their community's needs, the needs of the region, or a combination of the above. Strategies often refer to the need for international efforts to support or complement community needs or values, or vice versa.
Incorporating/engaging with local communities	8	44	
Regional, general	6	33	
Local, general	6	33	
Glocal, general	3	17	
<b>Uncategorised internationalisation aims</b>	12	67	These strategies mention aims that are unclear or undefined, such as being "truly international" or "internationally oriented". They portray an aim to be "more international" but do not define what that means.
Internationalisation otherwise undefined	7	39	
Being "globally connected" or engaged	6	33	
Be "internationally oriented"	5	28	
<b>Financial</b>	11	61	Strategies in this category focus on the financial elements of internationalisation, including funding sources for the university, allocation of funds and budgeting, or tuition fees and scholarships.
Financial, general	7	39	
Diversify income sources	4	22	
Reallocate/distribute funds	2	11	
<b>Culture and community (not specific to staff or students)</b>	10	56	These strategies focus on the type of community that the university wants to have, and they are not specific to staff or students alone. They focus, for example, on being an inclusive space or on the desired diversity of the university community. Often, these strategies refer to an appreciation of or celebration of diversity.
Inclusive environment	9	50	
Diverse community	6	33	
Dynamic community (engaged, lively...)	5	28	

## Appendix C. Frequency of strategies as identified in the key documents, embedded strategies, and total

	Key documents (n = 18)	Embedded strategies (n = 21)	Total (n = 39)
Global partnerships and networks	100%	100%	100%
Teaching and learning	100%	100%	100%
Graduate outcomes	94%	100%	97%
Research	94%	100%	97%
Staff skills and characteristics	100%	95%	97%
Students and the student experience	100%	95%	97%
Glocalisation/Regionalisation	78%	95%	87%
Reputation	78%	91%	85%
Financial	61%	86%	74%
Culture and community (not specific to staff or students)	56%	76%	67%
Uncategorised internationalisation aims	67%	38%	51%

## Appendix D. Universities represented by survey participants.

University	Staff/Experts		Students	
	<i>n</i>	% of 55	<i>n</i>	% of 203
Australian Catholic University	2	4%		
Avondale University	0	0%	1	<1%
Deakin University	2	4%		
Federation University	1	2%		
Griffith University	2	4%		
James Cook University	1	2%		
Macquarie University	0	0%	1	<1%
Monash University	5	9%	1	<1%
Newcastle University	4	8%		
Queensland University of Technology	1	2%		
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	1	2%		
Swinburne University of Technology	1	2%		
University of Melbourne	28	53%	198	98%
University of New South Wales	1	2%	2	1%
University of the Sunshine Coast	1	2%		
University of Technology Sydney	3	6%		
University of Western Australia	1	2%		
Wollongong University	1	2%		

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