

SESSION 1 - TERTIARY EDUCATION IN THE ASIAN CENTURY

Introduction

The Conference began on a high note with the speech given by Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, at the opening wherein, essentially, he emphasized that in order to meet the Asian Century head on, Australia must reinvigorate its educational systems to meet “Australia’s biggest opportunity since the Gold Rush.” He further described two scenarios for the audience which literally set the tone for the start of the Conference:

- 1) create the educational century within the Australian school system - improving the quality of teaching, learning and leadership, and
- 2) make Australia the “Oxbridge,” or the apex of academic excellence - attracting the best and brightest scholars of the Asia-Pacific region. He added, however, that these aspirations are deeply anchored on understanding Asia beyond its languages. More importantly, it is in the appreciation of its cultures, histories and hopes for the future.

How do we achieve that vision? What motivates Asia? What commonalities between these “Near North” neighbours can Australia draw from or provide strength to?

The speech of Hon Bill Shorten set the direction for the rest of the Conference and it seemed perfect then for the first session to discuss Tertiary Education in the Asian Century. Professor Peter Dawkins, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University (Chair) raised the following question - how can Australia engage the Asian region?

Speakers

Edward Byrne, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University

Professor Byrne began by describing the present age as a “massive global change wherein five centuries of Northern European domination is coming to an end.” He pointed out that the rise of Asia, the massive size of which is home to two-thirds of the world’s middle class, will drive global demand for products and services in the next fifty years, as noted by OECD. Indeed, Australian exports have already made a significant shift from its Northern centricity to Asian markets, where the top two exports (particularly for Victoria) in 2011-12 are tourism and education. It is interesting to note that the education sector ranks as Victoria’s top export, and third largest export nationally. Victoria’s education

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sector also earned twice as much export income as the tourism sector, with Monash University as the single most significant exporter.

Professor Byrne noted that international students currently comprise twenty per cent of the international activity across the nation's tertiary institutions. Referring to the 2013 report of the International Education Advisory Council headed by Michael Chaney, (where thirty per cent growth is anticipated by 2020), Professor Byrne expounded that international education is expected to contribute immensely to Australia through the following strategic directions: 1) innovation through research and innovation links with its Asian neighbours; 2) exercise of influential pressure through its education cohorts or what he referred to as 'soft power.' Professor Byrne noted that 'soft power' is crucial as shown by Australia's enthusiastic embrace of the 1950s Colombo Plan which generated the highest proportion of Asian graduates for Monash University more than any other Australian university. This translated for Monash University a massive number of alumni with a happy Australian experience in leading positions in Asia; and 3) an Asia-literate workforce. Clearly, an isolated policy for twenty-five million Australians simply pushes Australia backward. In his opinion, Australia has a unique opportunity to nurture an Asia-literate workforce where rich and healthy bi-directional flows of people and ideas exchange prevail with its Asian neighbours.

Professor Byrne then proceeded with vignettes that outlined the way Monash University gained a foothold in Asia through its branches and partnerships in a bid to create global citizens. Some highlights include:

- Unparalleled access in research and innovation with the highest quality of outcomes achieved through collaborations with Asian universities in Malaysia, China, India and Indonesia particularly in the areas of nanotechnology, bioinformatics, light metals, proteomics and water sensitive cities
- An increased profile for Monash University specifically in China supports its efforts in international student enrolment and, more importantly, enable its participation in China's rapid growth in education, research and development
- Strong government support such as in China or Malaysia where Monash-Sunway enjoys soft diplomacy ultimately strengthens links with Asian countries
- As a result of Monash University's integrated partnership with key Asian countries, its overall academic excellence is aligned with Asia's

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- Considering how important Asia is to Australia, it is surprising that only a limited one-third portion of Australian students go to Asian countries for part of their education, an area which has been inadvertently overlooked and should now be a priority

Elizabeth Lee, Senior Executive Director, Sunway Education Group and Sunway University

Ms Lee shared Sunway's experience and development as Asia's emerging leader in higher education through the efforts of Victoria University's alumnus and Sunway Group's founder and chairman Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah. Responding to a call from the government to provide for privately funded higher education, Mr Cheah introduced the pioneering Twinning Degree Programmes in Malaysia in 1987 where he was able to convince universities from the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand to participate in offering part of their undergraduate degrees through Sunway College. Monash University was among those few universities who offered the 2 + 1 or 1 + 2 programmes, which indicate the number of years a degree is completed in Malaysia and the Twinning university. The Sunway model soon became a hit with other colleges following suit as it allowed many students to acquire an international degree without otherwise having to spend extra costs overseas. It dramatically changed the playing field in terms of credibility of private education from that of Institutions for dropouts to a serious pathway to attaining an international quality education which was best conveyed in Sunway's original tagline, "Overseas education begins here." A unique component to the success of this model is the introduction of feeder programmes as a direct entry into the degree programmes. In 1988, Sunway introduced the first Western Australian Matriculation in Malaysia which was followed by the British GCSE and the Canadian Matriculation programme, thus, casting a wider net in attracting huge student markets.

Critical to Mr Cheah's decisions was to place the college under the Sunway Education Trust Fund during the recession in 1997 in order to protect the institution from erratic movements in the financial environment and continue to provide unimpeded services to Malaysian students. Another milestone in Sunway's development became evident through the establishment of the first international branch campus in Malaysia with Monash University, complete with its School of Medicine and Health Sciences and the establishment of the Brain Research Institute of Monash-Sunway. Malaysia now has seven overseas branch campuses and three more in the pipeline.

With many firsts tucked in its history, Sunway was finally awarded University status by the Ministry of Education and renamed Sunway University in January 2011. This has further propelled Sunway to improve its programs and continue developing partnerships such as its 3 + 0 programme with Victoria University and its Double Badged Degrees with Lancaster University. Sunway continues to align its business model to address the needs of the market. For instance, the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation has awarded close to USD50 million in scholarships and bursaries to over fifteen

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thousand students and established an endowment to Harvard University to establish a chair and to support faculty and students from all over the world to advance teaching and research on South East Asian Studies.

What is clearly evident in Sunway's story and obvious success is its unrelenting perseverance to be the No. 1 in the industry.

Dino Bettiol, Executive Director, International Office, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE

Mr Bettiol spoke mainly about Victoria's role in providing vocational education and training in Asia and NMIT's thrust to deliver these services through transnational education in its growing offshore markets in China, South Korea, and Malaysia, and with references to key opportunities and challenges. In an effort to support Australia's national objective to build productive capacity of the workforce in the Asian region, the 2011 Michael Knight Strategic Review highly recommended that VET providers including TAFEs be encouraged to seek offshore opportunities for Australian businesses and workers to obtain an improved presence in Asian markets. India is a prime example, but it has proved to be a difficult market to enter.

Amongst Australian TAFE institutions (based on NCVET data), the State of Victoria provides 75.3% of the total delivery of services to offshore students in vocational programs and it is important to note what makes its TAFEs more attractive than the rest. A closer inspection reveals that Victoria's TAFEs are fiercely competitive in domestic and overseas markets, through being self-reliant, acting independently, being responsive and commercially-minded.

There are definite opportunities present in each country in the Asian region but what is pivotal is to overcome the challenges identified, specific of which are:

- a) competition where everyone is looking into Asia including Asia; and
- b) poorly funded and resourced institutions in some countries (including India) which are ill-equipped to deliver Australian courses and qualifications.

Joanne Pyke, Senior Research Fellow, Victoria University

Dr Pyke drew on recently concluded research that sought to determine the role and influence of China-based alumni on tourism development. Her study revealed some striking issues and missed opportunities but the underlying problem points out that Australia's international alumni are a highly underutilized resource. There is a significant need for higher education to build stronger and more sustainable relations with its alumni networks particularly in Asia due

largely to its relevance to Australia's interests. Education and tourism accounts for approximately twenty billion dollars of the Victorian economy and increasing proportions are closely linked.

The findings of the research also suggest that Australia loses its Chinese graduates due to language barriers, the size of Chinese geographies, restrictions on communication and a limited alumni capacity. But what is truly compelling is the results on the main barriers to increased tourism among international alumni which raises the following key issues or implications:

- Main connection of alumni is through other students which shows that Australia-based networks are currently less than potential - this suggests that more emphasis should be placed on establishing long-term and sustainable relationships with Australia's international students and alumni because even when they have left Australia, these connections generate a direct economic impact through the frequency of their visits and volume of trade or business with the country
- Need for stronger alumni relations on a national and state-wide basis - what is beneficial to Victoria in terms of alumni relations' impact on tourism reflects on the rest of Australia
- It is in Victoria's interests to open up a rich, multi-faceted international student experience specifically through stronger community engagement, employment opportunities and a richer visitor experience
- Tourism and education share common objectives but a lot of missed opportunities or disconnects have surfaced, therefore there is a pronounced need for improved partnerships between these two sectors. For example a) marketing efforts in China: the tourism industry rarely includes education as a selling point when this is truly an important factor to the Chinese in considering their options. Similarly, university marketing can include tourism aspects when communicating with its Chinese market. Further, b) there are Chinese-speaking employment opportunities available for international students and yet these same students have problems finding employment in Australia.

Australia, it seems, is behind other countries in terms of capitalizing on its international alumni as a repeat visitor and as a rich source for knowledge and trade exchange. Conversely, China and India have stronger policies to stay in touch with their overseas alumni and have gained much in using these linkages.

The crux of the matter is that Australia is missing important opportunities offered by strong alumni networks and it is timely to invest in its alumni as a long term investment in partnership with Asia and the Pacific.

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Summary

Interestingly, this writer observed from the discussions that Victoria, and ultimately Australia as a nation, can gain far more from a conscious effort to strengthen and create a synergistic relationship among the different service sectors particularly the top three exports: education, tourism and business/professional management. In fact, all the speakers were optimistic that this is achievable through a more active engagement with Asia, beginning with linkages already present within Australia --- particularly the Asian international students and migrants. They are undeniably a powerful resource which should not be overlooked (anymore). It seems that Australia has now awakened to a new world where Asia, by its unmitigated population size, is positioned to drive the world's demand for food, products and services. If Australia fails to seize this opportunity now, considering its geographical and time zone advantages to most Asian countries, it will lag behind more aggressive Western countries like the USA and more so from equally competitive Asian countries.

Important points emerged in the talks and which altogether became the recurring themes throughout the Conference:

- Education and Australian universities are an outstanding service export which Australia should continue to capitalize on - The panel of speakers all concur that as Australia is now gaining worldwide recognition and momentum as one of the leaders of academic excellence in the Asian region, it should seize this opportunity to contribute its remarkable strength to Asia, or in the words of George Pappas, Committee Chairman of Melbourne and Chancellor of Victoria University, "become the Boston of the Asian century."
- "Diamonds in our drawers are underutilized," referring to the international alumni, Australian-Asian students and international students - seemed to be the understatement of the Conference as it kept reverberating throughout the different Sessions and implying a need for a more in-depth investigation as to why this has come about or why this particular sector has not been addressed much earlier considering that international students have been coming to Australia for more than fifty years
- International students are a valuable resource in understanding Asia - a realization which Australia now fully embraces.
- The Asian middle class as the driver of global demand for products and services is, in fact, the underlying force which gave rise to the Asian century.

Questions from the Audience

- 1) Larry Quick - *I represent various organizations and my question is on online education. Ed you talked about 30% growth but I think we're going to be clear that they are not the students of today where that growth comes from but from students 20-30 years from today. We're talking about students who are digitally-aware and online savvy is the norm whether they are taking information or using it for themselves in formal institutions....not only the pedagogy, but also business models and infrastructure. This change is going to create a major impact culturally on universities....Now what are we going to do about those buildings if everyone's doing it in their own backyards particularly in bread and butter courses where brand and specializations are king such as Harvard or one of the bigger universities? Where do we see it fitting in terms of this change? It hasn't even been mentioned today. But online education, is that going to play a part in growing or reducing the size of our education exports?*

Professor Byrne explained that it was difficult to predict with certainty how this change will develop in the future. However, he is confident that well established high brand universities which applies to Monash and most Melbourne universities, will continue to maintain a significant on-ground infrastructure. And while it may be true that large lectures can now be replaced by e-education, it is still crucial to a student's overall growth to expand traditional learning experiences with the new and best online learning analytics and techniques. Like most institutions which are investing more effort on e-education or online strategy, Monash is currently improving on incorporating these combined practices into their core operation through collaborations with leading international firms.

Further, he noted that a ten-year projection analysis of e-education in Asia revealed that this particular business model is not going to make a huge impact in financial terms. Barriers point to a very low English penetration particularly in China and perception issues in many Asian countries that believe e-education is not a legitimate way of getting a degree contribute to its slow growth. Nevertheless, the growth of e-education is definitely inevitable but perhaps more slowly than what has been largely anticipated.

- 2) Brooke Young - *Elizabeth, you talked about the pioneering spirit at Sunway, so I would be interested in your view about what the next frontier is for Australia and Malaysia?*

After having done an outstanding job of establishing the first branch campus of Australia in Malaysia, Ms Lee declares the next frontier to be in the aspect of double badging. She also suggested that Australia look into the possibility where its students fulfil a part of their degree overseas particularly in Asia. So far, it has been Malaysian students doing part of their Australian degrees in Malaysia or China. Ms Lee strongly believes that students who have the opportunity

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to travel and are exposed to mainstream Asian life will come back to Australia with tremendous insight that can potentially push the country even far ahead.

Professor Byrne offered new information that it is not legislation but, in fact, internal to each university policy to grant double-badged degrees. Under this scheme, quite a number of Monash students are awarded double-badged degrees.

Further, Mr Bettiol said that their overseas partners are also extremely interested in developing such linkages and the Asia-bound study grants which are becoming available will certainly add value to their business.

Ms Pyke pointed out that an equally important task is to ensure stronger interactions between international and domestic students which can thereby spur overseas interest and increase outward mobility among Australian students.

3) Bruce Rasmussen, Victoria University - *This is directed to Ed. I wanted to draw you out on a little bit about Chinese development, which I think is quite fantastic that you've been able to establish a partnership there, establish a campus there but what I'm really interested in is what was motivating the Chinese government strategically for entering into these partnerships with international universities and why they picked Monash....I'm also interested in the financial or economics for you in establishing your university there by comparison with onshore students or offshore students that you can make partnership arrangements in particular. Why is the Chinese government partnering with Monash? Is it financially motivated?*

Professor Byrne explained that the Chinese government believes they have much to learn from more experienced Western counterparts in the complexities of running and improving their higher education sector. Monash, in turn, has the ability to contribute in this respect. What is fundamental in sustaining Australia's unique collaborations particularly with China and India lies in its strong government funding support which allows Monash to provide for public education in foreign countries.

4) Richard, Victoria University - *I was struck in your presentation by the very small numbers of our domestic Australian students studying in Asian universities? And I was wondering what Monash or other Australian universities were doing to support and encourage an increased number of Australian students to spend some of their degree at Asian universities?*

Professor Byrne emphasized the importance of cultivating among young Australians a deeper cultural understanding of Asia which can create a desire to explore Asian countries through overseas stints rather than engage in their more usual

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inclinations to visit Europe and Northern America. He believes that student movement towards a more Asian experience is crucial to the development of Australia and he expects to see a reversal of the statistics in this regard.

- 5) Peter Dawkins, Victoria University - *Part of the objectives of this conference is to find out how Victoria can take advantage of this Asian century as a state and one of the questions we want to address is: is there a role for government? Not much has been said about government but much about initiatives from institutions. George Pappas in his article in The Age said that he thought government should provide scholarships to the best and the brightest to the Boston of the Asian century....so something that state government in particular should do to help really project us into this Asian century?*

(Due to lack of time, there was no related answer from the panel to this last question.)