

# International students bring a busy world to Sydney

**Paul Nicolaou**



**I**nternational students are a vital part of Sydney's economy so let's not blame them for the city's acute housing shortage.

Instead, blame a lack of planning, a lack of leadership and too much red tape stifling sensible development for the housing crisis.

Our valued international students are victims of this lack of foresight as much as local home seekers.

Business Sydney is unashamedly pro Sydney. We support things that add to its status as a global city. And, if you're a Sydney cheerleader, it's natural to welcome international students as part of our community.

Our great tertiary institutions have correctly made international students

a core element of their activities, our economy and our community life.

International students have added lustre to a global relationship reaching as far back as the post-war Colombo Plan.

Education visitors (their formal title) make an enormous contribution to Sydney's economy. International education is one of our state's largest service exports, worth \$7.6 billion in 2021-22 – second only to coal as an export earner.

Sydney would be so much poorer without our wonderful international students both in a community and an economic sense. We know this because we experienced their absence and associated negative economic hit for two years during the pandemic.

Fortunately, they have now returned in big numbers – one of the best things that has happened in our pandemic recovery. It is worth remembering how things were before the pandemic to get a sense of the

opportunity that is being restored.

In 2019, nearly 600,000 of the 8.7 million visitors who arrived in Australia were here to pursue education opportunities. Around 40 per cent of them came to NSW, with Sydney the gateway.

They make a huge contribution. The average international student spends \$19,000 annually compared with just \$1600 for short-term tourists. International education supported more than 95,000 full time equivalent jobs.

Tourism Research Australia confirms how international students are high value visitors. In 2019 alone they spent \$12.4 billion in Australia.

These education visitors accounted for just seven per cent of total visitor numbers but their higher than average contribution meant they accounted for 39 per cent of total visitor spending.

International education and tourism complement each other. One

in four international students, for example, have friends or family visit during their time here.

An economic miracle returns to our shores. It is also a human story.

International students come to our city to live, work and play. Their work contribution is an enormous benefit for our business community particularly in filling much needed positions in the hospitality, tourism, services and retail sectors.

From 2002 to 2021, there were 4.5 million international student enrolments in NSW – a vast number who ultimately return overseas connecting us to the world.

Educating so many people from our Asia Pacific region does as much, if not more, as official diplomatic efforts to build strong international relationships.

We also support generous provisions allowing international students to work here. In 2019, more than 11,000 worked in tourism or

hospitality. A further 12,000 worked in retail, or as farm hands, in construction, childcare and other areas of activity.

Among the many statistics in relation to international education, one shines very brightly. Reinforcing the message that international students are a fabulous source of global talent, 16 per cent ultimately migrate permanently to Australia.

It is vital that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Premier Chris Minns continue their support for international students as they will play a vital role as we go through the challenging economic times ahead.

Let's solve the housing crisis by building more, and quickly, but stop pointing a finger at international students. They are separate topics. The housing crisis must be fixed but not at the expense of losing or offending our education visitors.

**Paul Nicolaou is executive director of Business Sydney**