



Australia India
Institute

Indian student mobility to Australia

Developing the knowledge base for more effective engagement

Dr Andrew Deuchar
May 2021

Contents

FOREWORD	3
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
2. INTRODUCTION	6
3. STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS	8
4. KEY FINDINGS	9
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	13
Recommendation One: Generating networks through digital platforms	13
Recommendation Two: Generating networks through digital messaging and networks	13
Recommendation Three: Consolidating networks through mentorship programs	14
Recommendation Four: Extending networks	14
6. NETWORKS OF DECISION MAKING: CHOOSING TO STUDY IN AUSTRALIA	15
6.1 Indian cultures of education mobility	15
6.2 The importance of information garnered from contacts in Australia	16
7. NETWORKS OF SUPPORT: INDIAN STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA	18
7.1 Indian students' challenges in Australia	18
7.2 Getting connected, staying connected	19
7.3 Students as mentors: Forging networks of care and support	21
7.4 Expanding networks through part time work and internships	22
8. TRAJECTORIES OF INDIAN GRADUATES AFTER STUDY	24
8.1 Barriers to full time employment related to degrees	24
8.2 Networks offering linkages to work	25
8.3 The impacts of COVID-19 on graduates	25
9. CONCLUSIONS	26
APPENDIX A - SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS	27
APPENDIX B - SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATION AGENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS	28
REFERENCES	29

Foreword

Indian students make a vital contribution to Australian education. They play a central role in enriching academic and cultural life and ensuring the viability and growth of our institutions. Indian student mobility to Australia has even wider implications that extend beyond education to the broader bilateral engagement.

As the India Economic Strategy noted, “Education is so much more than increasing the number of Indian students coming to Australia. It also signals engagement, collaboration, a responsiveness to the priorities of India and a bridge between our two communities.”

This report investigates the key drivers for Indian students choosing to study in Australia, with the aim of strengthening that bridge between Australia and India.

The report illuminates the significance of Indian students’ networks in shaping students’ decisions to study in Australia, enjoy a positive Australia experience and gain employment. The findings reveal the crucial support provided by their Indian peers and the broader Indian diaspora community in Australia. It suggests ways to tap into the Indian diaspora and business community in Australia to further support Indian students and to promote Australia’s education brand in India.

This is an important report because it penetrates behind the data and allows Indian students to describe their motivations for coming to Australia in their own words. It adds detail and nuance to the findings of the larger surveys exploring international student motivations and decision-making in choosing international study destinations.

We wish to thank all those who participated in this project, particularly students who made themselves available for interviews during COVID-19 lockdowns.

This report was commissioned by the Australian Government’s Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE), and developed by the Australia India Institute in partnership with Austrade and the Group of Eight. We are grateful for their valuable guidance and for the insights of the education staff at the Australian High Commission.

I hope that education providers and other stakeholders find this report useful and that the insights it offers can contribute to a new influx of Indian students choosing to study in Australia.

Professor Muthupandian Ashokkumar



Acting Director, Australia India Institute

1. Executive summary

This report explores the motivations of Indian students choosing to study in Australia. The insights it provides into the key drivers for Indian students to choose an Australia study destination are based on a series of interviews with prospective, current, and former students at Australian universities and vocational education and training (VET) institutions, and with education agents and other stakeholders.

While reinforcing traditional motivations for students choosing to study abroad, this report underscores the importance of Indian students' networks and the crucial role played by the Indian diaspora in shaping their decision to study in Australia, their enjoyment of a positive Australian experience and their employment opportunities. These findings suggest that a focus on generating, consolidating and expanding networks with and between Indian students and the Indian diaspora and business community in Australia could play an important role in promoting Australia's education brand in India.

Stakeholder interviews

The report is informed by 54 stakeholder interviews. These include 36 in-depth interviews with prospective, current, and former Indian students at Australian universities and VET institutions, as well as 18 consultative interviews with education agents and other stakeholders.

Summary of key findings

Many of the well-known drivers for global student mobility are reported by the students participating in this study. Important drivers for Indian students choosing to study in Australia include post study work rights (PSWR), employment outcomes, university rankings and lifestyle opportunities. Students choosing to study in Australian VET institutions cited the expense and entry requirements as the two main reasons for not studying at an Australian university.

Apart from these factors, the student interviews revealed important insights about who makes decisions about studying abroad and what sources of information are most highly regarded. A recurring theme from the interviews was the significance of students' networks in shaping their decisions about where to study and the role played in those networks by the Indian diaspora in Australia.

The role of the Indian students' networks and the Indian diaspora

The Indian community, including student peers and the broader Indian diaspora and business community, provide a vital resource and a dynamic network for students both in shaping their choice of an Australian study destination and in enhancing the Australian experience of those who arrive for study.

Pre-departure: Students, their parents, and peers in India placed significant emphasis on getting information about studying in Australia from contacts who lived there, and valued this above information provided by education agents.

In-Country: Students with strong networks in Australia were more likely to have a positive in-country experience and better employment outcomes.

Accessing Networks: Students often accessed networks, both pre-departure and in-country, through digital platforms and websites, and digital messaging services such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Facebook.

The role of education agents, counsellors and other advisers

Students and their families will weigh an agent's recommendation for Australia as a study destination alongside information from contacts in Australia. Information from contacts in Australia is considered to be more reliable and trustworthy.

Employment outcomes

Employment outcomes are important to Indian students. Current students reported difficulty in finding suitable part-time work during study. Graduates were largely successful in securing employment although reported periods of

unemployment and underemployment. Some had converted part-time jobs during study into full-time roles. Students used their social networks to find employment, however these were mainly jobs in lower level service sector. Students found it challenging to build business and professional networks linked to their study area or chosen career. Students' networks were less able to support obtaining employment related to degrees as they had limited connections with "gatekeepers" of secure employment opportunities.

Recommendations

Given the role of the Indian diaspora in shaping Indian students' choice of an Australian study destination and in enhancing the Australian experience of those who arrive for study, the recommendations focus on ways that the sector can engage with the Indian diaspora to generate, consolidate and expand students' networks:

1. Australian universities and VET institutions should align social media, websites and other digital platforms to create opportunities for prospective, current and former students in Australia and India to connect to strengthen the recruitment process.
2. Australian universities and VET institutions should provide pre-departure pathways for enrolled students to link into digital networks to facilitate their arrival in Australia.
3. Australian universities and VET institutions should support Indian student mentorship programs to assist new Indian students navigate the challenges of living and studying in Australia.
4. Australian universities and VET institutions should work with the Indian business diaspora to assist Indian students to connect with potential employers and gain work experience.

2. Introduction

This report explores the motivations of Indian students choosing to study in Australia. The insights it provides into the key drivers for Indian students to choose an Australia study destination are based on a series of interviews with prospective, current, and former students at Australian universities and vocational education and training (VET) institutions, and with education agents and other stakeholders.

The impetus for this research is a 2019 report by the Council for International Education's India Reference Group (IRG). The report, *Positioning for deeper engagement: A plan for action in India*,¹ identified a need to diversify the students coming to Australia from India and to ensure that Indian students are able to access the full range of learning opportunities in Australia, including those outside the major cities. To that end, this research was undertaken to better understand Indian students' motivations for study in Australia and the role of education agents, counsellors and other advisers in influencing their decision.

India's unmet demand for higher education has mobilised large numbers of Indian students to travel abroad for study. Over 375,000 Indian higher education students studied abroad in 2019, and Australia remains the second destination of choice, after the United States.² There were almost 80,000 Indian student enrolments at Australian higher education institutions by December 2020. India is also an important source of international VET students, with almost 65,000 Indian student enrolments in 2020, attracted by Australia's reputation for providing quality, industry-relevant training and focus on globally recognised skills training.³

Despite these figures, the flow of Indian students to Australia was considerably disrupted in 2020 by the travel restrictions and lockdowns implemented to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher education enrolments were particularly affected, down by over 10,000 compared to 2019. The sector is also facing increased global competition from countries that kept their borders open throughout the pandemic, including Canada and the UK. Even before the pandemic, the UK's reinstatement of post-study work rights in September 2019 had attracted Indian students away from other study destinations such as Australia.

The pandemic has also impacted on overall satisfaction of Indian students. In 2018, the International Student Survey (ISS), a major source of information on the motivations and decision-making of international students globally, had recorded Indian students having high levels of satisfaction with their overall experience, and with their learning and living experiences, and higher levels of satisfaction compared to other international students in Australia (Table 1).

In this context of these global pressures, better understanding of the drivers for Indian students choosing an Australian study destination will aid the efforts to attract new flows of Indian students once the border reopens.

This report confirms many of the traditional factors motivating students choosing to study abroad, but it also underscores the important role of Indian students' networks and the Indian diaspora in their decision to study in Australia, their enjoyment of a positive Australian experience and their employment opportunities. These findings suggest benefits from a stronger focus in marketing and recruitment and student support services on generating, maintaining and expanding networks with and between Indian students and the broader Indian diaspora and business community in Australia, and enabling the diaspora to play an important role in promoting Australia's education brand in India. The emphasis on students' networks also suggest that the Indian diaspora could play an important role in promoting Australia's education brand in India.

¹ India Reference Group. (2019). *Positioning for Deeper Engagement: A Plan of Action for India*. Australian Government Department of Education.

² UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021). Global flow of tertiary-level students.

³ Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2020). Basic pivot table 2016-2019 [Data set]. Australian Government.

Table 1. International Student Survey 2018 - Key findings for Indian higher education respondents

Key findings	Nationality (2018)		
	India	Other Nationalities	Difference (+/-)
Overall Satisfaction with:			
Learning	90.6%	86.7%	3.9%
Living	91.4%	88.1%	3.3%
Support	93.5%	89.9%	3.5%
Arrival*	95.1%	91.7%	3.4%
Satisfaction with overall experience	91.6%	89.1%	2.5%
Learning element satisfaction with:			
Quality lectures	90.3%	87.5%	2.8%
Subject are expertise of lectures/supervisors	92.8%	92.6%	0.3%
Teaching ability of lecturers/supervisors	89.8%	88.0%	1.7%
Course content	90.7%	89.9%	0.8%
Course organisation	91.3%	87.3%	4.0%
Learning that will help to get a good job	82.7%	79.4%	3.3%
Career advice	73.8%	72.8%	1.0%
Work experience/placements as a part of studies	71.6%	70.8%	0.8%
Living element satisfaction with:			
Access to suitable accommodation	88.2%	86.2%	2.0%
Quality of accommodation	90.2%	87.4%	2.8%
Cost of accommodation	65.8%	59.3%	6.5%
Feeling safe and secure	96.1%	92.4%	3.7%
Opportunities to earn money while studying	64.1%	57.9%	6.2%
Recommendation - Institutes			
Encourage people to apply	83.1%	77.7%	5.4%
Neither encourage nor discourage to apply	12.8%	17.0%	-4.1%
Discourage to apply	4.0%	5.3%	-1.3%
Number of HE student responses	9,626	52,658	
Proportion of HE student responses (%)	15%	85%	

* Arrival questions were asked to all 1st year or short program students at the time of the survey

Note that the blue highlights indicate respondents satisfaction level that are less than 80%

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, International Student Survey 2018

3. Stakeholder interviews

The material presented in this report was gathered through in-depth interviews with three main sets of stakeholders: Indian students, education agents, and professional staff at Australian universities involved in student recruitment. In addition, interviews were conducted with a senior Australian academic who is an expert in international student mobility and an executive of an international organisation that facilitates student mobility. Most interviews were conducted in the second half of 2020, with an additional five interviews conducted in early 2021.

Three categories of students were selected for interviews: prospective students in India who were looking to study in Australia within the next 12 months, current students who had completed at least one semester of study, and recent graduates of Australian universities who had completed within the last three years. All student participants attended, or planned to attend, Australian universities or VET institutions. A list of sample questions can be found at **Appendix A**.

In total, 36 students were interviewed. This included 31 university students and five current students at VET institutions. The university students included six prospective students, 14 current students, and 11 graduates of Australian universities. Of these, 24 were masters students, six were doctoral students and one was an undergraduate student. The sample included 18 STEM students and 13 HASS students from 10 different universities across Australia. All of students came from first and second tier cities in India, with most students coming from Delhi and Mumbai. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this report to protect the anonymity of participants.

Additional interviews were held to elicit information on the broader recruitment and mobility context. These included six consultative interviews with executives within education agencies in India and Australia, as well as 12 consultative interviews with professional staff involved in student recruitment at Australian universities. Ten of these staff members held management positions and were based in Australia, while two worked in student recruitment offices for Australian universities and were based in India. Sample questions for these participants can be found at **Appendix B**.



4. Key findings

Summary of key findings

Many of the well-known drivers for global student mobility were reported by the students participating in this study. Important drivers for Indian students choosing to study in Australia include post study work rights (PSWR), employment outcomes, university rankings and lifestyle factors.

Those who chose to study in Australian VET institutions cited affordability and entry requirements as the two main reasons for not studying in an Australian university.

Apart from these factors, the student interviews revealed important insights about who makes decisions about studying abroad and what sources of information are most trusted. A recurring theme from the interviews was the significance of students' networks in shaping their decisions about where to study, and the crucial role played in those networks by the Indian diaspora in Australia.

The importance of social networks with Indian students and the Indian diaspora in Australia

KEY FINDINGS

- The Indian community, including student peers and the broader Indian diaspora community, provide a vital resource and a dynamic network for students both in shaping their choice of an Australian study destination and in enhancing the Australian experience of those who arrive for study.
- *Pre-departure:* Students, their parents, and peers in India placed significant emphasis on getting information about studying in Australia from contacts who lived there, and valued this above information provided by education agents.
- *In-Country:* Students with strong networks in Australia were more likely to have a positive in-country experience and better employment outcomes.
- *Accessing Networks:* Students often connected with each other and with their wider networks through digital platforms and websites, and digital messaging services such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn and facebook.

This report underscores the importance of the Indian student community and the Indian diaspora in Australia in directing students' decisions to study in Australia. The idea of diaspora includes not only immigrants and their subsequent generations, but also those long-stay international students who are temporary work-visa holders. There are about 700,000 people born in India or of Indian ancestry living in Australia, one of the largest and fastest growing migrant communities in Australia,⁴ and they provide a vital resource and a dynamic network for students both in shaping their choice of an Australian study destination and in enhancing the Australian experience of those who arrive for study.

At the pre-departure stage there were two main facets to this. First, students reported on Indian cultural expectations within their social groups that they would seek an international study experience, and described how the choice to do so was supported and even actively promoted by parents and friends [section 6.1]. Secondly, students, their parents, and peers in India placed significant emphasis on getting information about studying in Australia from contacts who lived there. These contacts were most commonly friends or relatives of Indian background who were already studying in Australia or who had graduated. In other instances, students developed new contacts to help with their inquiries [section 6.2].

Advances in information technologies have made it easier for prospective students in India to gain knowledge and insights from friends or relatives who have studied at Australian institutions. Students often connected with each other and with their networks through digital platforms and websites, and digital messaging services such as WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Facebook [section 7.2].

Students who had strong networks were also more likely to have a positive experience when they arrived. Networks provided practical help, mentoring for new arrivals [section 7.3] and in some cases work opportunities [section 7.4]. They served to foster a sense of inclusion and connection. Participants had recourse to their networks during times of hardship to gain support, and on some occasions to gain opportunities for paid employment [section 8.1].

⁴ Dhanji, S. and Rangan, H. (2018). Leveraging Australia's Indian diaspora for deeper bilateral trade and investment relations with India. Australia India Institute.

The role of education agents, counsellors and other advisers

KEY FINDINGS

Students and their families will weigh an agent's recommendation for Australia as a study destination alongside information from contacts in Australia. Information from contacts was considered to be more reliable and trustworthy.

Education agents were an important source of advice for many participants in this study. Students, their families and their peers discussed options for studying abroad with education agents and migration consultants. Education agents were helpful for visa applications and admissions processes and provided practical support finding accommodation and settling into their new surroundings.

Most participants in this study had clear ideas about what they wanted to study when they approached education agents and were more interested in advice about where they should study. Agents provided clear information about courses offered at different universities. Some students reported that education agents successfully convinced them to study in Australia. More commonly, students and their families would hold an agent's recommendation alongside other information they could garner about studying in Australia. Information gathered from contacts in Australia was considered to be more reliable and trustworthy [section 6.2].

Employment outcomes

KEY FINDINGS

- Current students reported difficulty in obtaining suitable part-time work during study and found it challenging to build professional and business networks linked to their study area or chosen career.
- Graduates were largely successful in securing employment although reported periods of unemployment and underemployment. Some had converted part-time jobs during study into full-time roles. They reported a key challenge as being companies' misperceptions about the temporary graduate visa or unwillingness to invest in short-term employees.
- Students used their social networks to find employment, however these were mainly jobs in lower level service sector. Students' networks were less able to support obtaining employment related to degrees as they had limited connections with "gatekeepers" of secure employment opportunities.

Employability has become a key driver in international education. Employment during study and after graduation was important to the students and graduates who participated in this research. They reported mixed employment outcomes in Australia (the interview group did not include students who had returned to India or third countries).

Table 2. Student visa holders 2016, propensity to work, total and top 10 countries

	Employed	% of total	Total
India	36,820	65%	56,350
Nepal	14,982	75%	19,955
China	14,179	12%	121,669
Thailand	10,091	63%	15,980
Vietnam	8,539	42%	20,193
Brazil	7,881	68%	11,662
South Korea	7,788	47%	16,548
Indonesia	6,305	44%	14,226
Colombia	6,078	78%	7,841
Pakistan	6,004	61%	9,763
Other countries	59,366	43%	138,588
Total	178,033	41%	432,775

Source: Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, based on *Insights from the Australian Census and Temporary Entrants Integrated Dataset, 2016*

Employment during study: Many Indian students rely on part-time employment while they study. In Australia, international students are eligible to work up to 40 hours each fortnight during term time, and unlimited hours outside term time. The 2016 census provides indicative data on student employment during the period of study. At that time, 65% of Indian students reported having some employment, numerically the largest pool of employed international students with almost 37,000 in employment (Table 2). Current students interviewed for this report commented on the difficulty of finding suitable part-time work during study. They found it challenging to build professional and business networks linked to their study area or chosen career [section 7.4].

Graduate and post-study work: India is one of the largest source markets for take-up of temporary graduate visas by university and VET graduates. Since 2015-16 over 200,000 temporary graduate work visas have been granted in Australia, with 60,000 of these granted to Indian graduates (28%) (Table 3). Many of the graduate students participating in this study had successfully secured employment post-study (80%), some by converting part-time jobs during study into full-time roles, however many had experienced periods of unemployment and underemployment [section 8.1]. Graduates reported that companies did not understand their temporary graduate visas or did not want to invest in them if their work rights were only temporary [section 8.1]. Students' networks were less able to support obtaining employment related to degrees as they had limited connections with "gatekeepers" of secure employment opportunities [section 8.2].



Table 3. Subclass 485 Temporary Graduate visas granted for citizenship country India, 2020-21 (to 28 February 2021), comparison with previous years

Sum of Total		Financial year of visa grant					
Visa Subclass	Visa Stream	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21*
485 Temporary Graduate	Graduate Work	932	906	1,382	1,972	1,570	1,096
	Post-Study Work	3,944	6,152	8,443	12,180	12,966	8,707
	Skilled Graduate	9	6			<5	
485 Temporary Graduate Total		4,885	7,064	9,825	14,152	14,538	9,803
Grand Total		4,885	7,064	9,825	14,152	14,538	9,803

Source: Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2021

*to 28 February 2021

Many of the known barriers and challenges faced by international students wishing to pursue post-study work or long-term employment in their host country of study, were also reported by the students participating in this research. These included lack of understanding of the work environment, insufficient professional networks and employer misperceptions about work rights and visa status.

Students sought to use their social networks to find employment opportunities, however these networks were more successful in helping students acquire jobs in lower level service sector, such as hospitality, rather than full-time jobs related to their degrees. The Indian business diaspora remains a largely untapped resource for Indian students seeking employment, including the Indian multinationals based in Australia. The Australia India Business Council and other bilateral business organisations could help connect students and graduates to wider business networks linked to jobs related to their degrees.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation One: Generating networks for recruitment

Australian universities and VET institutions should align social media, websites and other digital platforms to create opportunities for prospective, current and former students in Australia and India to connect to strengthen the recruitment process.

All students interviewed reported using digital media to obtain information about studying abroad. While educational institutions and education agents often provided useful information through digital platforms, many participants reported that information from contacts in Australia was the most trustworthy and valuable. At the same time, participants reported that there were limited opportunities for interaction with their peers in Australia prior to their departure.

There is scope for education providers and recruitment agencies to diversify how they use digital media for student recruitment to enable prospective Indian students to draw on the knowledge of Indian students and graduates with experience studying in Australia. This may include promoting Australian education by showcasing “success stories” of Indian students and graduates, and ensuring digital platforms link prospective students with current students and graduates. Australian universities could host online forums with colleges in large Indian cities and create mechanisms for students in each location to connect on both a formal and informal basis.

Recommendation Two: Generating networks for in-country support

Australian universities and VET institutions should provide pre-departure pathways for enrolled students to link into digital networks to facilitate their arrival in Australia.

Students who were linked into digital networks had a more positive experience of studying in Australia than those who did not. Becoming linked in with digital networks often helped students establish themselves by assisting with finding accommodation, developing social networks and helping students access support during times of hardship. Digital networks also enabled students to share and receive important information in an efficient way. Most university students who attended pre-departure briefings were linked in with digital networks. Students at VET institutions were less likely to be linked in with digital networks, such as WhatsApp groups prior to their departure. Those who were not linked in with digital networks reported having difficulties when they arrived in Australia. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that all Indian students are made aware of existing digital networks and strongly encouraged to join them prior to their departure.

Recommendation Three: Consolidating networks through mentorship programs

Australian universities and VET institutions should support Indian student mentorship programs to assist new Indian students navigate the challenges of living and studying in Australia.

Some participants in this project played active roles in supporting other Indian students. They reflected on their own hardships and devised ways to ensure that incoming students did not experience the same difficulties. This support ranged from assisting with finding accommodation, study support and preparing for, and finding, paid employment. Students commonly offered such mentorship in an informal capacity, but they sometimes offered it through more formal channels, such as in volunteer roles and even paid roles in student support offices. Indian student mentors are often the first point of contact for newly arrived students, and they represent a considerable resource for educational institutions looking to enhance the experiences of Indian students. Institutional support for formal mentorship programs would coordinate their efforts and provide institutional recognition of their contribution.

Recommendation Four: Extending networks into business

Australian universities and VET institutions should work with the Indian business diaspora to assist Indian students to connect with potential employers and gain work experience.

Indian students who were able to gain part time work during their study often did so through their networks. In most instances, however, they were only able to leverage their contacts to gain insecure positions unconnected to their area of study, such as those in restaurants or service stations. Student support offices were limited in their capacity to help students find part time work and focused services supporting employability although universities offered services in resume writing and job preparation skills which students found helpful. Such interventions largely neglect the significance of networks for gaining access to employment.

Given the importance of students' networks for finding part time work, education institutions could place more emphasis on helping Indian students build connections with potential employers, working particularly with the Indian business diaspora and tapping into their broader business networks. There is scope to support students to connect with Indian multinationals based in Australia and to build students' business and professional networks through links to bilateral business organisations such as Australia India Business Council (AIBC), the Australia India Chamber of Commerce (AICC), The Indus Entrepreneur (TIE) and industry groups such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). These organisations might be conceived as "bridges" between Indian students and individuals, organisations and sectors that they may employ them or help them gain part time work.

6. Networks of decision making: choosing to study in Australia

A recurring theme from the interviews was the significance of students' networks in shaping their decisions about where to study. Our interviews revealed that students' decisions about where to study were driven by their networks.

There were two main facets to this. First, students reported on Indian cultural expectations within their social groups that they would seek an international study experience, and described how the choice to do so was supported and even actively promoted by parents and friends.

Secondly, students, their parents, and peers in India placed significant emphasis on getting information about studying in Australia from contacts who lived there. These contacts were most commonly friends or relatives of Indian background who were already studying in Australia or who had graduated. In other instances, students developed new contacts to help with their inquiries. They asked their contacts about their economic prospects, safety, the quality of the education and lifestyle opportunities, in particular. Participants reported that advice from these contacts, predominantly members of the Indian diaspora in Australia, was more important than advice from agents, teachers in India, or promotional material because it was more reliable.

Many existing reports on Indian student mobility frame choices about where to study as decisions made by an individual. Such analyses isolate a set of criteria and then invite prospective students to rank their importance. These studies are particularly useful for generating data in a timely fashion in the production of large datasets. This approach downplays the involvement of other actors in the decision-making process by situating the individual as the locus of decision.

6.1 Indian cultures of education mobility

A number of students reported on the cultural expectations within their social groups that they would follow their peers and study overseas. Most students reported that their parents supported their choices. Radhika, a 22 year-old Arts student, stated that:

My parents have always been those two kinds of people who are really fine with whatever you choose. I remember when I was 18... They were like, now you make the choices, we can just advise you on them. So they were just fine with it. In fact, they were really up for it, because they really wanted me to go.

Students often discussed their options for studying abroad with fellow students and other peers. Some students reported that they regularly discussed lifestyle opportunities, career prospects and opportunities for personal growth in their friendship groups. Geeta, a 27 year-old construction management graduate from Ahmedabad, said that "talking to her closest friends" was important for her decision making:

I think what really pushed me to maybe want to study further and then want to go outside of India to study further is... some of my friends who I went to high school with, or even when I went to university with were already studying their masters abroad when I was still in India... I guess, just a lot of those conversations helped me.

Mohit, a 26 year old creative writing student, reflected on the importance of his contacts and peers in shaping his decision to study abroad, and also the level of social expectation that he sought in an international study destination:

...let's say as a young adolescent, probably in my early 20s and coming from a fairly upper middle class background, I did see a lot of my peers moving abroad to study that could have informed my blueprint in my career trajectory or my academic trajectory to pursue a master's abroad because it's quite a common social trend as well and the cultural trend in the demographic and socioeconomic strata under which I fall.

These comments suggest that Indian students' choice of Australia as a study destination is best understood not simply by examining an individual student's motivations or profile, but by examining the web of relationships in which they are embedded. For Indian students these relationships also include networks into Australia and links with the Indian diaspora in Australia.

6.2 The importance of information garnered from contacts in Australia

Students, their families and their peers discussed options for studying abroad with education agents and migration consultants. Most participants had clear ideas about what they wanted to study by the time they approached education agents. They were usually more open to advice about where they should study. Most students reported that education agents in India were very helpful for visa applications and admissions processes. Agents also imparted clear information about the courses offered at different universities. In some instances, education agents successfully convinced a student to study in Australia. More commonly, students and their families would hold an agent's recommendation alongside other information they could garner about studying in Australia.

Students and their parents in India could gather a lot of material about studying abroad through university websites, education agents and other sources. But some students suggested that education agents were “telling them what they wanted to hear” and would not always give them clear responses to their questions. By contrast, information gathered from contacts in Australia was considered to be more reliable and trustworthy. One student observed:

I think the first option that anyone would look for is they would consult their friends or family who live in that country. My first point of contact would be my cousins in Melbourne. So they were the first people I reached out to. I asked them about the universities, the life over there, how's it different from India.

Some students reported that friends in Australia were in a strong position to showcase the lifestyle and that this encouraged students to study in Australia. Meenakshi, a 25 year-old management student, linked this to social media:

...that is something that attracts, you know, where your friends are enjoying, that they're going to events where they are showing their lifestyle. Something that differentiates Australia from other cultures is definitely the weather, the culture. So if someone is seeing what you are doing in a Facebook feed, I think that would be a little bit aligned to come here just because of the lifestyle...

Other students emphasised the ways that contacts in Australia could prepare students for what they might expect when they arrived. Vipin, a 25 year-old environmental engineering student, consulted friends in Australia on a range of issues:

I asked my friends in [name of university] and they told me that the education is totally different from what we see in India. Education is based on assignments, practical, and through your own understanding you give the exam. So this way I wanted to prepare myself mentally so that I would be comfortable in this atmosphere... And the second thing I asked them was “Where could I stay there?” Like in every part of the globe, in every city there is actually a few areas in the city where you should not stay with respect to your own preferences and areas where there's comfortable surroundings everywhere.

Students also reported being drawn to the prospect of studying abroad when they heard stories of others who had managed to do so successfully. This was the case for Tushar, a prospective PhD student from Dehradun in north India:

I remember when I was a kid, I used to go to my friend's place. And he told me that his brother is working in Australia and Australia is a great place. And he was always having a lot of appreciation about Australia. Since those days, I started developing a kind of fascination for Australia as one of my dream destinations.

In addition to contacting existing connections to garner information about studying in Australia, some students sought to establish new connections with members of the Indian diaspora through LinkedIn and Facebook. These connections were crucial for advising students about their experience at university and their likely trajectory after completing a particular course. For example, Anjana, a 22 year-old marketing student made contact via LinkedIn with Indian graduates living in Australia who had completed her proposed course and asked them:

How was the subject? How was the faculty? What's the difference in studying in India and studying in Australia? What is the kind of preparation you need and the kind of mindset that you need?

When Anjana was asked whether this was information she could get from other sources, she commented that these connections gave insights that education agents and other outlets could not:

Even back in India, [education agents] sort of help students understand the different universities and the courses and give advice, [but] they fail to give you that exposure, maybe that connection to the students who are already studying there or connect them.

Soniya, a 23 year-old business management student also forged connections through LinkedIn. She said that they were important for addressing questions she had about studying in Australia. Through LinkedIn she:

...found connections with people who had jobs in the industry or at least the roles that I was interested in... So I reached out to people who were either studying the degree that I was studying to make sure that it's worth it. And [I] reached out to people who had a job to see how they got there.

Another student who forged connections through LinkedIn explained, "I actually wanted to speak to someone who studied there or who has finished their studies and wanted to see what the outlook is, after your studies and stuff like that."

Having the opportunity to connect with alumni and other contacts was crucial in students' decision making. This was the case for Subhash, a 28 year-old engineering student:

I had a friend, a childhood friend, at [name of university] as well. And he did give me a good idea about how the situation is in Melbourne, what sort of living accommodation I'll be in, living expenses, how's [name of university] and he helped me find a place to live in as well when I came in here first. I think that settled my heart a bit to be like, "Okay, I've got a support system, if not a lot more, to bank on when I come to Melbourne."

Information garnered from contacts in Australia was potent because it satisfied the concerns of students, their peers and their families. Interviewees said that their parents' concerns for their safety was satisfied when they knew that there was a family member or friend in Australia who could support them. Contacts were able to give insights into living expenses and the likelihood of finding suitable employment. Contacts in Australia were also able to explain to students what the lifestyle was like in Australia and more general information about living abroad.

Alongside factors such as Post Study Work Rights and long-term employment prospects, students sought clear information about the lifestyle in Australia, their degrees and other opportunities. Moving beyond a focus on what factors individuals consider to be important, our interviews revealed insights about who makes decisions about studying abroad and what sources of information are most highly regarded.

These findings suggest that the emphasis in the India Economic Strategy on increasing trust and confidence in Australian education institutions may best be advanced by harnessing the capacity of Indian students' contacts and networks in Australia, including current Indian students and alumni, and the Indian diaspora. Educational providers should consider enhancing scope for prospective, current and former students to connect through digital networks and social media platforms.

7. Networks of support: Indian student experiences in Australia

The interviews also highlighted the importance of networks for Indian students' experience studying and living in Australia. Students with stronger networks had a more positive academic and social experience and were more sheltered from the negative effects of COVID-19.

7.1 Indian students' challenges in Australia

The most immediate challenge that many students faced was finding accommodation and settling into their new surroundings. Students reported that their institutions and education agents often provided practical support. Universities often organised transport from the airport for students to short term accommodation but students found their long-term accommodation options to be expensive relative to other options, such as shared private rentals. One student had initially agreed to pay \$440 per week for university accommodation prior to arriving Melbourne. She commented, "Thankfully I didn't take it because I had relatives here and they let me know that's very expensive". Instead, she secured more suitable and affordable accommodation for \$250 per week.

At university and VET institutions, some students reported having difficulties meeting learning expectations and navigating the academic differences between Australia and India. Some students attributed this to differences in approach to exams and assignments in India and Australia. One student commented that in India they were expected to "copy and paste everything that the lecturer says and that is how you get top marks. But in Australia, that is plagiarism". This was not the case for all students. Students who had attended elite secondary schools or universities in India before coming to Australia reported that meeting learning expectations in Australia was not particularly difficult because they had been taught in learning environments with similar expectations as their universities.

Many students commented on the lack of opportunity to interact with domestic students. Students were sometimes in courses with a large number of students from other countries. A 26 year-old management student said his course of approximately one hundred students included 80 students from China, ten from India, and ten from a selection of other

countries. He remarked that some international students seemed to have little interest in getting to know other students and had limited English language skills. At the same time, there were few domestic students in his course which limited his opportunity to make Australian friends. Students in VET institutions made similar comments, with one student stating that "I haven't been in a class with a single domestic student".

The difficulties students had interacting with domestic students in classrooms often extended across their institutions more generally. Aisha said that friendship groups in her Indian college were organised in what she termed an "opt-out" way, meaning "you assume every first year is your friend and everybody does everything together". But in Australia she said it was an "opt-in" process where you do not assume you are friends. Aisha gave an example of when she came to this realisation:

I met [Australian students] in classes, or at some practical session, they text me when the assignment is due, or when any quiz is coming up, or they need help with something. So, when that's done, that's the end of the conversation, I never hear from them, I might just text, "Okay, how are you doing, just checking up on you, if you're struggling with something," and that was it, like I didn't get any response from them.

Similarly, another student stated that "When you're in group work, it's like how to get the work done, no one really thinks how the other person is, or 'Let's make the friendship.'"

Even though most students reported having difficulty making friends with domestic students, there were some instances of students finding it relatively simple to do so. Each student who had done so emphasised the importance of taking the initiative. For Mohan, a 26 year old graduate, sport proved to be the key:

We used to go to pubs to watch Premier League. So that's how I met a lot of domestic students who like AFL footy. So, if you want to meet Australian people, you have to take interest in the things they like.

Some students had experienced racism in Australia. One student provided the example of having her bag checked when leaving a supermarket, while her friend was not asked, although he also had a bag. Another student in a regional

university said that she was told she was taking a job from an Australian, while another student said that she was not invited to social events when all classmates were and she said she thought this was because of her race. These students said that these experiences, although isolated, tended to affect them over time. They became hesitant in social settings and expected it to happen again.

Some of these difficulties were exacerbated by the onset of COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19 lockdowns, many students were well connected and lived near their institution. They would ordinarily visit campus each day and attend events. But this changed significantly with lockdowns and campus closures. Some current students reported feeling quite isolated when having to work from home. Some students reported that a main limitation with online teaching was that it does not facilitate interaction and provides no scope for making friends with other students.

The students most acutely affected by COVID-19 were those who arrived early in 2020. A student at a Sydney university stated that:

I came right through this Corona time, and my whole experience was ruined. I just went to one week to uni and the rest of the time I was just sitting at home and it was actually quite depressing at times because I'm in a new country, I couldn't go anywhere and I couldn't work. I'm paying so much rent for nothing, just for online classes

Despite reporting that Australia had managed COVID-19 more effectively than some other countries, current students who arrived at the start of 2020 said that they would not have come to Australia if they had known how their education would be affected. They thought that the cost of their degrees should be reduced significantly because they were not getting what they paid for. However, those who arrived in 2019 and had completed at least one semester of face to face learning on campus were more positive.

7.2 Getting connected, staying connected

Making connections was central to how students navigated many of these difficulties. Pre-departure briefings in India were one of the first ways that students were able to expand their networks. Students who attended pre-departure briefings found they provided practical advice, such as how to use public transport, as well as providing opportunities to meet other students. A common sentiment was that "it meant that when you arrived in Australia, already you could see that person [from the pre-departure briefing] and say, okay, that is someone familiar". This helped students settle into their new environment. Those who did not attend pre-departure briefings, by contrast, reported feeling isolated when they arrived in Australia.

Pre-departure briefings were often the place that students became aware of WhatsApp groups and other ways that they could use digital media to connect with other students. By making connections through technology, students were able to gain information about how to find suitable accommodation, where to stay and how much to pay. Some students used these kinds of digital media to develop connections with their classmates prior to leaving India to make their arrival smoother. Chandan, reported that:

WhatsApp has really helped, but I'd say mostly connecting with my batch mates. So like also when I was back in India... I joined WhatsApp groups... and then I just spoke with my peers. Because I have come here but I am still an Indian inside. I like Indian food, so I definitely wanted to stay with people who also enjoyed Indian food so that we can cook together and enjoy. So those WhatsApp group really helped me find my peers, my batch mates who are the same...

Another student, Rashmi, used digital technology to connect with peers in a similar way. She explained how this helped her gain a clearer sense of what to expect when she arrived and find accommodation in Australia:

I logged onto the Indian Student Association, Facebook page, and [name of] Instagram page and I randomly sent out DMs and messages to people, hoping someone would reply. [One person] responded and through her I was able to find an accommodation. A couple of Indian students also alumni's of [name of university] were leasing out a single room and that's how I got in touch with them and found myself an accommodation.

As these comments show, a further strength of networks facilitated through digital media was that students could post questions and get very quick responses. Other examples included students sharing information such as where to get good Indian food, information about events that were happening on campus as well as social occasions more generally.

Most students reported that university orientations were also important for helping them navigate university and for joining student clubs and societies. Students reported that the main benefits of orientations were that they helped students to familiarise themselves with campus, gave them the opportunity to meet new people, and offered insights into learning expectations and how to meet them. Orientations also gave students further information about the experience of living in Australia and where to find support if they needed it. Most students we interviewed became engaged with one or more student clubs and societies during their degree. These groups varied from interest groups to Indian clubs that celebrated Indian cultures and festivals. During the COVID-19 pandemic some of these clubs communicated the university's advice about changes to teaching and assessment, as well as about university campus closures.

Students reported that having networks was crucial for helping them manage the challenges of living in Australia. In some instances, students discussed how friends and relatives offered logistical support. For example, Anjali said:

My partner's brother is an Australian citizen, so I had my accommodation, like family part, sorted. Otherwise, it gets really hard if you don't know anyone and you're just coming on your own. It just does take a while to actually soak into the culture and just make new friends. It gets really intimidating otherwise.

Other students reported that connections in Australia and having friends on campus was very helpful because it meant they had something to do on campus once their classes finished. It also meant they were able to manage to meet the demands of university while sharing domestic labour. Tanuj explained how shared living arrangements with other Indian students from his university have helped him:

One of my classmates was in the same course, so we took the house share together, so it will be easier for us to do the assignments and stuff like that... Because if you're going to the university, generally there's a three hour lecture or four hour lectures, and you're doing your assignments, stuff like that. You are staying whole day in university, you don't have any sense of what to eat and what not. So if someone is coming home and food is ready to eat, he has a peace of mind. That's how we managed our things, all our friends. One of them cooks on Wednesday, one of them cooks on Friday, one of them on Tuesday. So we share these things and timings like that. And Sunday we have all day off, so we do all the cleaning work.

For those who had developed strong networks, university campus became not just a site of learning but also one of sociality. Sharing resources also assisted students with day to day living and helped them navigate the challenges of university more generally. Conversely, those who did not have strong networks reported being quite isolated. One student stated:

Well, if I had to now go back and give advice to my 22 year old self, I would ask him to sign up to one of those WhatsApp groups, I think at least it helps to have access and a sense of belonging in some kind of community in a new place. I think that's a social need which all of us have...

These findings speak to the importance of linking students with digital technologies to build their networks. Education providers and student support offices should support enrolling students to link into such networks prior to their departure.

7.3 Students as mentors: Forging Networks of Care and Support

Students were not simply the recipients of productive interventions, as in the case of pre-departure briefings and orientations, rather they actively forged networks that offered care and support throughout their studies. Several students developed ways of mentoring and supporting other students at university and VET institutions. Most of the time this occurred informally. For example, one student had lived in Australia for three years and she made sure that new Indian students she met at university had all the information they needed. This ranged from offering practical advice about how to get to university and how to do assignments, to how to write resumes and how to look for work. She said that she does this mentorship because there is limited understanding among some Indian students about how to approach potential employers and how to write effective resumes. Having had difficulty herself finding suitable part time work, she stated that “I want to be that person for other people where I can tell them, “This is not worth your time. Go find something better, you can do it, or apply here, do this.”

While students often mentored each other informally, some students supported students through more formal channels. Some participants were very involved with student clubs and student representative bodies at university, and some had obtained part time jobs that supported other students.

For example, Anjali reflected on how some of her hardships had encouraged her to assist other international students by becoming a volunteer:

I did volunteer work to welcome new international students and help them transition. Because I missed my orientation when I came and I was like, “Oh, it’s orientation. Never mind. I’ll just stay a week more with my family. I’ll just figure it out.” And then I realised how much I had missed in the start, not knowing where to go in your lectures, how to read the timetable. So I had a hard time. So I wanted to help other international students like me to transition into this different life in a very easy, smooth manner.

Similarly, another student named Milly volunteered in a mentoring position which eventually led to a paid job assisting students with their studies. Milly explained that:

I started working in peer mentoring roles that were also paid, so I started as a volunteer then stepped up to do admin duties and stuff. Started taking more formal teaching roles, well, formal in the sense that you have to get paid for it as a PASS leader, so Peer Assisted Study Sessions, but it’s not like teaching-teaching. You’re academic support, but yeah, started doing that. Started working in orientation... Then I became the events and engagement support officer with them for a year in my honours.

Another student named Alisha had become the president of the Indian student club at her university. The club originally offered Indian students an opportunity to connect with each other, to attend events and celebrate Indian festivals. But since COVID-19 it has shifted to offering online workshops and has started encouraging students to access support. She said that this has been challenging because some members of the Indian community are reluctant to access support:

A lot of students won’t turn up because going to a psychologist or a counsellor is some way considered a taboo, like they don’t want to get help, they think that they will become a smaller person if they ask somebody for help, and they don’t usually open up. If they’re trying to seek help, they keep it very personal, so what we did was we are sending out regular emails that have all the resources that university is providing.

Other examples included a student who was elected to the student council at his university and another student who had created a student club to help students clarify their career trajectories and help them link with industry leaders. This student organised workshops which invited relevant business leaders to meet management students to attend share information about the industry. She said that she created this workshop because she thought there were gaps in what other clubs were providing and students had a lot of unanswered questions. Students involved in these forms of mentorship became key players in the Indian student community, and reported being in a strong position to offer other students care and support.

7.4 Expanding networks through part time work and internships

Part time work during study was an important way that some students sought to meet living expenses. But for most of our participants, economic factors were only part of the justification for pursuing part time work. Students considered part time work to be an important stepping stone to find a well-paid job. Part time work also offered students the opportunity to build their networks. Even if the job was not related to a degree or desired profession, students said that it was important to have domestic working experience and a professional contact in Australia who could advocate for them. Some students reported that part time work of any kind was an opportunity to demonstrate skills that would be needed in other sectors, such as reliability, hard work, team work capabilities, communication skills and commitment.

A small number of students reported that members of the Indian community sometimes helped them find part time work. Saurabh, a 24 year-old construction management graduate, approached an Indian owner of a service station during his studies as he was looking for work. There was no work available in the service station but because of his academic competencies he began tutoring the owner's son in mathematics and English. In other instances, young people obtained more formal positions through their contacts. Anjani secured a part time job as a dental assistant in Sydney by drawing on contacts she had in India. This job was offered to her without her having made a formal application. When reflecting on the importance of networks for gaining work, she stated that:

I think the more you know people, you never know how someone might come in handy, so the more you make connections, the better it is. And I got lucky, but I know a lot of my other friends who have also gotten jobs due to reference. I know very few people who've actually applied for the job and gotten it through the website. A lot of my friends they've told them that, okay, there's a job opening over here, there's a job opening. It's not that they don't apply or anything, but they don't really get answers back.

Another important dimension of paid work was that it gave students the opportunity to expand their networks. Some students reported that paid work gave opportunities to interact with people from a range of backgrounds that other settings did not. For example, a 22 year-old student in Melbourne secured a part time role at an arts organisation. She worked alongside an investment banker from a German background who was on a working holiday. She said this was important "exposure" and that there would be very limited opportunities for this kind of interaction in India. Other students also discussed work in terms of how it offered opportunities for self-improvement. For Anjani:

...if I am able to make friends where I am working, that is more than what I could ask for. But I was looking how to improve my skills and apply my skills, to learn, to gain experience, and also to be able to contribute where I'm working.

Finding suitable part time jobs could sometimes be difficult. Most current students interviewed did not have contacts that could help them find part time jobs that were reasonably secure and linked to their chosen career. In these circumstances, some participants worked for delivery services.

Access to employment was a challenge for most current students we interviewed. A small number of students reported that their universities were effective at facilitating linkages with workplaces. One student said that they had the managing director of a large company give a lecture to students which she said was more helpful than some of their academic lectures. Similarly, students from VET institutions said that their institutions put considerable emphasis on helping students find work. However, most university students were critical of how their institution related to industry and said that their university did not do enough to facilitate linkages with the workplace. One student suggested that there was limited assistance in terms of developing effective communication skills, understanding how to address people, and how to engage with different people in different settings.



Even when universities created portals for part time jobs and other opportunities, these were not always productive for international students. Many students found it difficult to find part time work through formal channels because most of the time they did not receive a response. On other occasions the university organised internships that were only available for domestic students. Students without strong networks often struggled to find part time work. One student secured a job at a major supermarket but had to apply ten times to be successful. Among participants, students who were able to draw on their networks to find part time work had more success than those who did so through formal application processes. Alongside a focus on fostering job preparation skills which focus on the employability of an individual, education providers should consider how they can help provide Indian students with work placements or employment opportunities and build connections with potential employers.

8. Trajectories of Indian graduates after study

8.1 Barriers to full time employment related to degrees

Although nine of the 11 graduates we interviewed were working at the time of interview, most of them had experienced a period of unemployment or underemployment. Two graduates who were able to start full time work immediately after graduating did so by converting a part time job during study into a full time job. This was the case for Avdshesh:

I was working part-time in a law firm as their public relations coordinator. So they were very happy with my job there. And once I graduated that sort of automatically converted to full time and they gave me sort of a promotion there. So, it was more easy for me. I never actually faced any of those issues which other... I would say 99% of the students face. For me it was quite different.

Some of our participants reported that their visa status was a barrier to finding employment. According to Ashok:

The biggest challenge with finding a job here is that employers look for a permanent residency or an Australian citizenship, which is this invisible barrier which you're confronted with despite having the qualifications or the relevant work experience.

One student reported that he had applied for 73 jobs without success. After securing Permanent Residency, he was able to gain full time work. Most respondents said that potential employers ask if you have PR during interviews, and others make explicit in the advertisement that PR is a requirement.

Other graduates reported that employers wanted to hire graduates who had work experience in Australia. Work experience in India was not usually recognised by employers in Australia, unless it was for a well-known multinational firm.

Some graduates reported being frustrated that they could not find full time work, despite most of them being eligible to work in Australia as part of their Post Study Work Rights (PSWR). Graduates' understanding of their exclusion was that companies did not want to invest in them if their work rights were only temporary. One executive in a large multinational company who we interviewed affirmed this perspective. He said that business hired citizens and those with PR for full time roles but regularly employed those on PSWR for fixed term positions. At the same time, the *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce* (2019) suggests that additional reasons that employers may not hire international students and graduates is that they harbour misconceptions about the rights and entitlements of migrant workers.

Graduates tried many strategies to find employment. One graduate reported paying money to secure an unpaid internship and said this was a common practice. Others said that there are many micro-courses that graduates are completing online as a means of distinguishing oneself from other graduates. These practices were verified with interviews with some education agents. Both parties reflected that this underscores the importance of educational institutions focusing on internships and other linkages with industry so that graduates might take advantage of their Post Study Work Rights.

8.2 The impacts of COVID-19 on graduates

Some of the graduates we interviewed had been unemployed for an extended period. It was not uncommon for graduates with masters degrees to work insecure jobs for delivery companies. But our participants reported that they were relatively lucky compared to others and they knew many in their courses who had not found jobs. For example, one graduate had been working for a delivery company before securing a 12 months contract in a customer service role:

I got a job with [name of company] as a customer advisor in their collections team, because they need people right now. Everyone's freaking out on their loan payments and stuff. So I have got a full-time one-year job for a year. So that kind of has given me stability in terms of financial situation... When I didn't have that, I was driving Uber for like crazy eight hours just to maintain... just to be able to pay my rent and food, because there was no support from anywhere.

The negative effects of COVID-19 had been particularly acute for some graduates. One graduate returned to India at the end of 2019 to visit their family. With the bushfires over the 2019-2020 summer, she decided to delay her return. In March when the bushfires had subsided, COVID-19 lockdowns prevented her from returning to Australia. As of July 2021, she was in India unable to work and has a large education loan accruing interest that she is unable to pay back. Other students also mentioned that many of their fellow students in Australia have endured significant hardship. These experiences cohere with recent reports that highlight the adverse ways international students have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Berg and Farbenblum, 2020; Kinsella, 2020).

Despite the challenges graduates faced, most of our respondents had fared well in securing jobs. One possible reason for this is that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, employers are issuing short term contracts, and so are prepared to give jobs to those whose visas may only permit them to work in the short term. This meant that students were able to meet their living expenses and mitigate some of the financial impacts of COVID-19.

8.3 Networks offering linkages to work

Those who were able to find full time jobs on PSWR usually did so through networks. For example, one graduate from a university in Brisbane, obtained a job through a family friend. He signed a contract soon after finishing his degree and had remained in the job until returning to India during the COVID-19 pandemic. He intends to return to Australia and recommence his position as soon as the borders reopen.

Another student built up her networks during her studies, and was able to get a job by drawing on these when she graduated:

So I think I was just kind of really active and all these student clubs, and I used to attend all these club events, whether it was about industry participation, or not. They would even have random things like pizza night or whatever. So anyway, I think one thing led to the other. I had gone to the company where I work for, for a breakfast with one of those student clubs, they do it every year for various other companies as well. And I just met people in that office. And this happened, I guess, in March 2019.

Most students were not able to draw on their networks to gain full time jobs related to their degrees. Students' networks usually helped them acquire jobs in lower level service sector, such as in hospitality, but not to full time jobs related to their degrees. Indeed, one of the main limitations of students' networks is that they did not tend to have strong connections with "gatekeepers" of secure employment opportunities.

The Indian business diaspora remains a largely untapped resource for Indian students seeking employment. There is scope to support students to connect with Indian multinationals with Australian offices and to build students' business and professional networks through links to bilateral business organisations. The Australia India Business Council (AIBC), the Australia India Chamber of Commerce (AICC), The Indus Entrepreneur (TiE) and other peak Indian business and industry groups in Australia such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), offer connections to wider business networks that might provide employment opportunities for students and graduates to gain jobs related to their degrees.

9. Conclusions

The findings of this report highlight the importance of Indian students' networks in driving the decision to choose Australia as a destination for study. Alongside more traditional factors such as PSWR, graduate employment, university rankings and lifestyle factors, students' networks significantly influenced their decision to study in Australia.

These networks are strongly grounded in the Indian diaspora in Australia and the long-stay Indian international students who are temporary work-visa holders. They provide a vital resource for prospective students both in shaping their choice of an Australian study destination and in enhancing the Australian experience of those who arrive for study. This report highlights the benefits of giving the Indian diaspora and business community in Australia a more prominent role in promoting Australia's education brand in India.

Australian universities and VET providers should incorporate these Indian diaspora networks into their engagement with Indian international students. The recommendations propose that Australian institutions consider recruitment and support strategies that focus on generating, maintaining and expanding networks with and between Indian students and the broader Indian diaspora and business community. They aim to create the conditions where Indian students can strengthen their own networks that provide the support and encouragement for study in Australia and that promote Australian education in India.



Appendix A - Sample survey questions for students

Sample questions apply to prospective, current and former students

1. What are the main reasons you want to pursue education abroad?
2. Why did you choose to study in Australia, as opposed to a country like Canada, the UK or the US?
3. How did you get information about studying at Universities abroad? Eg. Internet searchers, friends and relatives, education agents.
4. Were migration consultants and other agencies helpful for you? Why or why not?
5. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your perception of Australia as a study destination?
6. Do you still plan to study in Australia, given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. Did your parents or other family members affect your decision of where to study? If so, how?
8. How do you think Australian universities could encourage more Indian students to study there?
9. Have your experiences of studying in Australia met your expectations? How or how not?
10. What are some of the main challenges you have faced?
11. How effectively has the university communicated the impacts of COVID-19 on your course?
12. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your study plans?
13. How as the COVID-19 pandemic affected what you plan to do after you graduate?
14. Did you engage in paid work or an unpaid internship during your study? Was this important for you?
15. Would you recommend studying in Australia to others, such as friends or family members?
16. How do you think your university could improve the experiences of international students, particularly from India?
17. Did you manage to find work after completing your degree? What are some of the main challenges you faced in that process?
18. Is the job that you were able to find related to your degree, and broader career plans? [if applicable]
19. What are your career plans and how has COVID affected these?

Appendix B - Sample questions for education agents and other stakeholders

1. What are the key reasons that Indian students choose to study in Australian universities, as opposed to other countries such as Canada, US and UK?
2. In your view, how do young people in India gain information about Australian universities and other international institutions?
3. What are the most common questions that prospective students ask about studying in Australia?
4. What are some of the key barriers that prospective students face? [financial, visa, social and cultural considerations]
5. A prospective student walks into an education agent's office wanting to come to Australia. What are the key factors that turn an inquiry into an enrolment?
6. What do you think the key challenges are for students who migrate to Australia for study?
7. Why do you think that most Indian students tend to go to a cluster of universities in Victoria and New South Wales?
8. How do you think that students' perceptions of Australian universities will change in light of the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. How do you think the COVID-19 pandemic will affect student mobility generally?
10. How could Australian universities improve their student recruitment strategies and attract more Indian students?

References

Australian Government. (2019). *Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce*. Retrieved from: https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/mwt_final_report.pdf

Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2020). Basic pivot table 2016-2019 [Data set]. Australian Government. <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Pages/InternationalStudentData2019.aspx>

Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2020). India Country Brief. Retrieved from:

<https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/Pages/india-country-brief#:~:text=These%20students%20made%20132%2C079%20enrolments,and%20246%2C454%20enrolments%20in%20Australia>

Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. (2021). Subclass 485 Temporary Graduate visas granted pivot table [Data set]. Retrieved from: <https://data.gov.au/dataset/ds-dga-c957d829-4f9b-4213-a0c2-8cbeb9a03ffb/details>

Berg, L., and Farbenblum, B. (2020). As if we weren't humans: the abandonment of temporary migrants in Australia during COVID-19. Migrant Worker Justice Initiative.

Dhanji, S. and Rangan, H. (2018). Leveraging Australia's Indian diaspora for deeper bilateral trade and investment relations with India. Australia India Institute. Retrieved from: https://www.aii.unimelb.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Aii_Diaspora_Study_for_India_Economic_Strategy.pdf

Group of Eight. (2020). COVID-19 Roadmap to Recovery: A report for the nation.

India Reference Group. (2019). Positioning for Deeper Engagement: A Plan of Action for India. Australian Government Department of Education. Retrieved from: <https://internationaleducation.gov.au/news/latest-news/Documents/India%20Reference%20Group%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021). Global flow of tertiary-level students. Retrieved from: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>



Australia India
Institute

147-149 Barry St, Carlton, VIC 3053

 aii.unimelb.edu.au

 aii-melbourne@unimelb.edu.au