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Thank you for the invitation to join your conference and have the opportunity today to talk about Austrade's expanded role in marketing and promoting Australia's education services internationally.

As the Government's trade and investment development agency, Austrade is a global organisation with extensive experience working in and understanding global markets as they relate to a range of Australian enterprises and sectors.

It was in this context that the Government decided last year to transfer the international marketing and promotion of education from Australian Education International to Austrade.

That decision will take formal effect on July 1 this year.

So today, I'd like to explore what that decision might mean for the sector, and what you can expect in the months and years ahead from Austrade.

In doing so, I am aware of some recent commentary about Austrade's new role in marketing and promoting international education.

Let me say that I consider a number of the doubts and criticisms expressed to be misinformed and misplaced, as I hope to demonstrate this afternoon.

I'd like to start off with an overview of how Austrade understands the role of international education as much more than just a commercial one. In particular, that our quality education system and institutions are a critical part of Australia's international future.

I will then explain in more detail some of the specific capabilities Austrade brings to a partnership with the education sector and to the task ahead of us.

Austrade's Approach to International Education

There can be little doubt about the *economic* significance of Australia's world-class educational institutions.

Last November, there were about 629,000 enrolments of full fee-paying international students in Australia on a student visa.

During 2008-09, Australia earned A\$17.2 billion in export revenue from education services.

In the process, that income helped to employ more than 120,000 people, either directly in the education sector or indirectly in the rest of the economy.

That makes international education Australia's fourth biggest export earner, after coal, iron ore and gold.

But for Austrade, promoting international education is about much more than the calculus of export revenue. It is equally about investment in Australia's future.

We appreciate that the broader role of education in Australia's national and international life makes its promotion much more than about just pure commerce, important as that is.

For Austrade, it's also about safeguarding and developing the future of our international relationships; about our geo-political interests; and about our capacity to engage successfully in a competitive and sophisticated global economy.

In a globalised world so dependent on the skills and knowledge which only serious learning can deliver, education has a critical role to play.

The knowledge and personal connections created by studying abroad, especially the transfer of ideas and cultural understanding, helps to underpin the economic stability and political harmony between nations.

We know that international education can increase the skills base of Australia, not just the workforce of the students' home country.

We also know that international students are more likely to remain connected with the nation where they once studied; or stay behind for further research or to pursue their career in some other sphere.

The importance of international education is also increasing, no more so than in our own dynamic region.

According to the OECD, as quoted in the Bradley Review, the number of international students in the world has increased by three times between 1985 and 2006.

For Australia, where the growth has been higher still, this demand has helped to grow our educational institutions and their capabilities with consequent benefit for Australian students, at the same time creating a major export sector, one that we expect will consolidate and grow.

And it has also created a vast network of connections and relationships between Australians and people from many different lands – connections that will last generations.

It is for that reason that the Prime Minister launched the Australia Awards scholarship initiative in Singapore last year.

As people in this room would be aware, Australia accounts for around one tenth of the world market for higher education, ranking in the top five nations behind the US, UK and France.

Australia also has the highest proportion of international students in tertiary institutions out of the advanced economies, according to the OECD.

I am conscious that there are a range of drivers behind these numbers, both educational and non educational, and that these figures could change in the future – but they do highlight the significant growth and change that has taken place in the sector.

Through our geographic location and existing trade and investment ties with Asia, Australia is participating in one of history's great economic and social transformations.

The 21st century will be Asia's century; a time when the Asia Pacific region will be both politically and economically critical to global development.

Nations such as China and India are becoming economic superpowers, thereby intensifying our existing commercial and educational links.

Austrade understands these developments and their importance to Australia, not least because of our extensive network of staff and posts throughout Asia.

Australia is playing an influential role in educating the scientific, business and political leadership of the growing Asia Pacific region.

Through our universities, our vocational education and training institutions, and English-language schools, we are contributing to the growth of the knowledge-based economy of our region.

And we understand that these long-term connections with the leaders, thinkers and professionals of tomorrow are critical in advancing Australia's national interests.

Indeed, our promotion of international education represents one form of **public diplomacy** along with building strong and vital links with the alumni that return to their home country to make contributions to their respective communities. It is for this reason among others, as Deputy Prime Minister Gillard has observed, that from an international perspective, quality is paramount for our education offerings.

By getting out the right message about what type of nation Australia is and what we can offer, this public diplomacy helps to build our security and prosperity.

Against this background, Austrade brings particular strengths to the promotion of international education.

I'd like to talk a little about three of them.

Austrade's Global Network

In the first place, Austrade is an international organisation with a global network in 55 countries and 99 points of service to market and promote Australia's capabilities, products and services.

Our trade commissioners and business development managers have extensive knowledge of markets and people in their respective areas of responsibility.

Austrade worked with more than 15,500 businesses in 2008-09 and helped out on more than 500 inward investment projects.

This global network and the experience it delivers can make a key contribution to the strategic development of our international education services.

And on the way through, let me correct a few misperceptions about Austrade's focus and activities.

As the trade and investment development agency of the Commonwealth Government, we are **not** as a rule in the business of just promoting commodities, as some have noted recently.

On the contrary, Austrade is in the business of assisting firms and institutions of all sizes develop markets and new products and services, as well as promoting new investment opportunities.

In fact, Austrade promotes some of the world's most sophisticated **services**, including in the areas of clean energy and the environment; high quality financial products; biotechnology services and the creative arts.

So we consider that Austrade's background and experience with a range of creative and sophisticated trade and investment clients gives us a good base to embrace even further the marketing and promotion of Australia's education to the world.

Austrade's understanding of the cultural context of global commerce and of the importance of investing in long term relationships are strengths we bring to the promotion of Australia's education sector overseas.

Austrade's Experience with Education

Secondly, the promotion and marketing of education is not something new for Austrade.

Austrade has been closely involved in the international promotion of education for about a generation.

Along with Australian Education International and other agencies, we have developed expertise in this area: expertise on which we will build further from July 1.

And let me say categorically that this will not be a numbers game for Austrade.

We keenly understand our important role assisting in the recruitment of quality students, to attend quality institutions, for a quality education or to undertake serious research and have a quality experience.

That means finding smart ways to work with Australia's approximately 107 public education providers and 1,006 private providers as they seek to engage with students overseas and their agents.

It will also mean using Austrade's global network to help local public and private providers find quality offshore business partners.

We aim to help our local providers improve their understanding of foreign markets and what overseas students need to know about Australia's educational and training institutions.

In fact, Austrade already coordinates a program of over 50 international trade fairs and seminars for international education across the globe.

As part of our new responsibilities, we are already consulting major education stakeholders about our future direction from July 1.

The Government's response to the Bradley Review of Higher Education made clear that students and their needs are the focus of the sector, along with a renewed focus on quality.

In this regard, we note the importance of the proposed new body to monitor the standards of providers, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency.

As Bruce Baird's interim report into the Education Services for Overseas Students Act reveals, students are worried about the quality of their courses and the reliability of information about studying in Australia.

Above all, international students, many of whom (or their families) have struggled to find the money to study abroad, need to be given the chance to have a positive, safe and rewarding educational experience in Australia.

We want them to take that experience into their future engagement either in Australia, or with Australia, as they build their future careers.

At Austrade we are also aware that our marketing and promotion programs must recognise that one size does not fit all in international education.

Whether it be universities, vocational and training colleges, English-language schools or secondary education, Austrade's promotional efforts will naturally reflect these distinct segments; and be linked to quality providers.

Sustaining Australia's position in the international education market is also something that Austrade takes seriously.

At present, Chinese and Indian students comprise the largest share of our international student population. And looking to the future, growth of the sector will also depend on emerging markets, such as those in Latin America and the Middle East.

Let me say, as well, that the promotion of education at Austrade is also about appreciating the role of research and ideas, not just enrolments.

Building new research and development links with foreign scientists is one way to broaden our knowledge-base in science and technology.

In 2008-09, for example, Austrade hosted a visit from officials at Abu Dhabi's MASDAR Institute of Science and Technology to promote our alternative and sustainable energy sector.

As a result of their visit, new links were established between the Institute and several Australian organisations, along with a promising scholarship program.

Similarly, in 2009-10, Austrade's Visiting Researcher Program is sending leading Australian academics and PhD students in renewable energy to Europe to expand their contacts.

The program, a joint initiative between Austrade and Australian Education International, gives researchers a week in Europe or Russia where they can meet fellow scientists, industry groups and local media.

Austrade can also promote inward and outward investment in education.

Inward foreign direct investment can help Australia build knowledge centres – we are doing that as we speak with one major multinational company looking to establish a research institute, possibly in Australia.

And with Asia's growth, Austrade will promote the overseas presence of our local providers as they expand offshore if they seek such support.

Brand Australia and Education

Thirdly, there is another important point to make today about Austrade's capabilities and what we bring to the promotion of Australia's international education sector.

Austrade is playing the lead role in developing the important Building Brand Australia project, the four-year, \$20 million program announced in August 2009 by the Minister for Trade, Simon Crean.

This project is not about logos and jingles, as some commentators have suggested.

It is about positioning Australia for the 21st century.

It is about developing a narrative about this country that reflects modern Australia.

It is about an Australia which is much more than a mine, a farm and a beach - it is also a country of innovation, creativity and diversity - a diverse, multifaceted and multicultural society.

That's the story we want to tell.

And the quality of a nation's education system is one of the major criteria by which foreigners rate a nation's significance.

Our national reputation is one of a friendly, sunny nation with a beautiful natural environment. We are these things and we are much more than that.

We are a global participant making major contributions in such areas as climate change, the shape and development of the G20 and new work on nuclear non-proliferation.

Australia's significant achievements in technology, industry, science and culture are the envy of many but are not always broadly known.

Our national reputation –our national brand--needs to be updated to reflect the reality of our society, our economy and our culture.

The quality of our education services, our universities and training institutions, will be critical components in underpinning the new Brand Australia.

I would note that Professor Margaret Gardner, the Vice Chancellor of RMIT, is a member of Minister Crean's appointed Advisory Board on the Brand Australia program. So the higher education sector is well represented on that senior advisory group.

Austrade is aware, perhaps more than many, of the complex debate over national image and reputation and how that can affect and be affected by, different elements of our society and economy.

And we well understand the importance of such a reputation for our international education sector.

Education is a whole-of-government effort

It is important at this point for me to emphasise that Austrade does not see itself acting alone in the marketing and promotion of international education.

Our partnership with educational providers, whether they be universities, vocational training institutions or English-language schools, will be critical.

And given the multi-dimensional nature of international education, Austrade will be working also with a range of Commonwealth and State agencies on our marketing and promotion efforts.

Clearly, there are those responsible for international education policy and institutional regulation; those responsible for immigration and student visas; for the domestic safety and well being of students; and of course, our public diplomacy offshore.

Austrade will work closely with colleagues from agencies in all these areas and any others we need to join with in order to do our job effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this is both an exciting and a challenging time for Australia's international education sector.

And Austrade, having been given an expanded role in the marketing and promotion of Australia's international education services, is looking forward to working with the sector and other Government agencies.

Together, we will be working to achieve sustainable growth and realise the sector's full potential to contribute to Australia's place in the world.

Austrade's new promotional role, we believe, along with the various measures and reviews initiated by the Government, will go a long way to meet the challenges of supplying quality courses and programs to meet the growing international demand for quality education and training.

Austrade is ready to do its part in pursuing that aim.

Thank you.

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