

Submission Re: English Language Teaching International Engagement Strategy 2025

IEUA-QNT welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Australian Government's *English Language Teaching International Engagement Strategy 2025*.

IEUA-QNT represents ~17,000 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions in Queensland and the Northern Territory and consistently engages in industrial and education debate at both state and national levels through its Education and Industrial Committees and through its national counterpart, the Independent Education Union of Australia, which receives input from teachers in all States and Territories.

With respect to the English language teaching sector, we note that 98% of ELICOS students indicate that teaching quality influenced their decision to study in Australia [1]. The industry has, therefore, a strong positive reputation among international students, but there are a number of threats to ongoing quality which require urgent attention. These are discussed in the context of the Objectives, Actions and Measures of Success of the draft strategy, below.

Objective 1: Australia provides English language learners with a world-leading student experience

Action 1:1 Maintain and enhance quality assurance mechanisms and policy frameworks to facilitate the student experience

Action 1:2 Support and enhance the student experience

In a general sense, our union is in agreement that a central objective of the sector should be to provide English language learners with a world-leading experience. We would, however, caution that the ability of a given provider to achieve this objective is crucially dependent on teaching staff and the extent to which their working conditions provide a secure, professional teaching and learning environment.

Several recent studies have demonstrated that teachers' working conditions are inextricably linked to student outcomes, with favourable work conditions predicting higher rates of student achievement/growth in a number of subject areas [2-4], including English language learning [3].

Analysis of our membership data clearly indicates that the ELICOS sector relies heavily on teachers employed on casual and short-term contracts (Fig. 1), with 48% of teachers employed on a casual or contract basis.

This significantly constrains the quality of learning experience provided to students and, anecdotally, is a source of significant professional frustration for our members, who have no little to no access to planning, preparation and correction time or professional development activities.

Any effort to maintain and enhance quality assurance mechanisms and policy frameworks must, therefore, address not only conditions for students, but also the working conditions of those providing instruction. Only then will the sector achieve the goal of supporting and enhancing the student experience.

One initiative that could assist in professionalisation of the sector would be the introduction of registration/accreditation of ELICOS teachers, similar to schemes for teachers in schools.

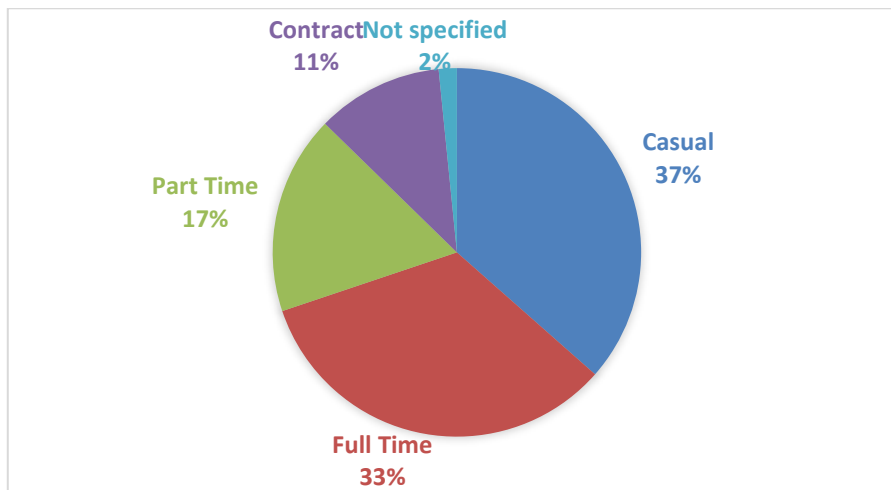


Figure 1: Employment Status of ELICOS Teachers

Graph shows percentage of IEUA-QNT members from the ELICOS sector (Queensland and Northern Territory Branch) employed on a Full Time, Casual, Part Time and Contract basis.

Objective 2: Australia’s English language teaching sector actively embraces new opportunities and innovative practices and models including online and offshore

Action 2:1 Identify new markets and business opportunities

Action 2:2 Identify and encourage adoption of new and innovative practice and models in English language delivers

As noted in our response to Objective 1, the quality of learning experience offered to students is critically dependent on conditions of employment of teachers and instructors. In this context, the danger in on-line and offshore modes of delivery lies in the potential for further erosion of working conditions for English Language Instructors. If, for example, an Australian English Instructor takes up a position in an offshore facility, it is currently unclear whether they would be given equal pay and conditions to their colleagues working in onshore facilities.

Any erosion of pay and conditions has an immediate impact on the quality of learning experience available to students and our union would caution that any ‘new’ or ‘innovative’ business model should be accompanied by a compulsion to consult with English Language Teachers regarding the impact of the new model on teaching and learning practice.

We would also note that introduction of a registration/accreditation system like that noted in response to Objective 1, above, could be tied to industrial conditions to ensure that the ELICOS teaching workforce is provided with working conditions that are conducive to professional practice.

Objective 3: Australia’s flexible English language teaching sector supports both stand-alone English study and seamless transition into further studies

Action 3:1 Build capacity in supporting English language students making a seamless transition into further studies

Action 3:2 Ensure consistent whole of Australian Government promotion, branding and messaging

Given that the need for stand-alone English study co-exists with a need for transition to further study, it is imperative that the sector continue to cater to both. It is important however, to note that there have been numerous media reports of declining English standards for international

students (e.g. [5-7]). In addressing public concern around this issue, Government should be compelled to do more to support students in successfully learning English. In this context, the working conditions of English Language Teachers are of substantial importance.

At present, the sector is characterised by high levels of casual and short-term employees (Fig. 1). This lack of investment in teachers is the single greatest threat to quality of educational outcomes and Government should be actively seeking to professionalise the sector, rather than creating conditions which not only allow, but reward, business operators who undermine the professionalism of their own staff by providing insecure, deprofessionalised working conditions. While it is important that there is flexibility within the sector, this cannot come at the expense of working conditions as these are essential for quality educational outcomes.

Another point of note is that, in determining metrics for measurement of successful transitions to further study, it is essential to measure course completion rates, rather than course commencements.

In terms of branding of the sector more broadly, if the intention is to highlight the quality of Australian offerings compared to their international competitors, moves to enhance the professionalism of the Australian workforce should be a fundamental goal. Ideally, practitioners should also be supported to undertake research into effective ELICOS pedagogies.

Objective 4: Australia's English language teaching sector is recognised as a valued and integral part of Australia's international education sector

Action 4.1 Articulate and promote the value of the English language teaching sector and the value-add offered by Australian providers

Our union strongly supports greater recognition of the contribution of English language teaching to the education sector more broadly. We would however, argue that this plan does much to support employers, but relatively little to support the teachers and instructors who carry out the essential work within the sector.

Current working conditions for English Language Teachers and Instructors are far below the standard enjoyed by their counterparts in other sectors (e.g. universities). This does little to promote the attractiveness of the profession and this, in turn, does little to ensure that best practice prevails. Our union is of the opinion that, without professional pay and conditions, any attempt to raise the quality, and perceived quality, of instruction provided in the English language sector is futile. We would therefore suggest that government reimagine the *International Engagement Strategy* to include specific commitments aimed at raising pay and conditions for those who work in the sector.

To further the cause, it may also be helpful to establish a dedicated Parliamentary Secretary for the sector.

Measures of success

More international students from a diverse range of countries access Australian English language teaching in Australia, online and overseas

The most recently available data on international education exports indicates that the ELICOS industry generated an income of \$30.8 billion in 2017, with large numbers of students from China and India in particular [8]. Diversification of the student body both reduces the likelihood of disruption and opens up new markets for expansion. As noted above, 98% of ELICOS students indicate that quality of teaching was the single most important reason for choosing Australia to further their studies[1].

Australia has, therefore, a vested interest in ensuring ongoing quality in the sector. Throughout this submission, we have consistently repeated the statement that quality of education is critically dependent on the quality of working environment provided to teachers. At present, the sector is

heavily reliant upon casual and short-term labour (Fig. 1), which is counter to the overall goal of preserving Australia's position. We urge government to consider what more it might do to preserve and enhance the quality of learning experience offered to ELICOS students by enhancing employment conditions for teachers in this vital sector.

There is deeper and more strategic engagement and interaction between English language providers and other parts of Australia's international education sector

Given that the majority of ELICOS teachers are employed on casual and short-term contracts (Fig. 1), it is unrealistic to expect them to engage deeply with their colleagues in other parts of the international education sector. Fostering true professional relationships requires ELICOS teachers to be granted working conditions that are conducive to enhanced professionalism, including planning, preparation and correction time, access to professional development and - at a more fundamental level - provision of stable, secure work.

International students continue to be satisfied with the quality of their English language study experience in Australia

Data from the 2018 International Student Survey indicate that 90% of ELICOS students are satisfied with their experience[1]. This suggests that ELICOS teachers are doing remarkable work in the face of serious, systemic challenges and points to far greater gains that could be made if working conditions were enhanced to parallel those in other education sectors.

International demand for Australian expertise on English language teaching system design and teacher training continues to grow

We note, with interest, that this is the only element of the International Engagement Strategy which makes any reference to a need for ongoing teacher training and development. Teachers in other sectors are routinely given access to professional development, as it is recognised that this has a significant and positive impact on teaching and learning practice.

As a first acknowledgement that teachers in the ELICOS sector are also professional educators, and should have access to ongoing professional development, this outcome highlights the profound disconnect between expectations of ELICOS teachers and the conditions under which they perform their work. To ensure the ongoing quality required for Australia to remain a destination of choice for ELICOS students, substantial resources should be invested in enabling ELICOS teachers to operate as professional educators.

Concluding Comments

In a general sense, Australia's ELICOS sector enjoys a positive reputation among international students, but current working conditions of ELICOS teachers are not conducive to the level of professionalism required to maintain this reputation. Our union strongly suggests that Government review its commitment to the sector in light of what provisions it might make to enhance, rather than erode, the professionalism of ELICOS teachers.

We thank Australian Government for the opportunity to engage in consultation and would welcome the opportunity to participate in further discussion.



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Branch Secretary

Independent Education Union of Australia -Queensland and Northern Territory Branch
26 March 2020

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