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Re: Enquiry into Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the enquiry into Migration Legislation Amendment (Student Visas) Bill 2012.

ACPET supports Knight Report recommendations 23, 24 and 25 that mandatory visa cancellation should be removed, and that more discretion be given to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to consider all aspects of individual cases. This is consistent with the philosophy of proportionate risk-based regulation, which ACPET is known to advocate, and it also provides a more considerate treatment to individual students. For these reasons we support the provisions of the Bill to enact the recommendations.

We understand the need for DIAC to be able to contact students for a variety of reasons, including when they are reported by providers through PRISMS for non-compliance with their visa. We support the requirement for providers to pro-actively maintain student contact information on their student databases, which most reputable providers would do already.

However, there is an amendment included in this Bill that will have serious administrative and financial implications on providers - the proposed requirement for providers to enter on the existing PRISMS system the contact details for accepted students within 14 days of being notified of a change. At present providers will enter the student address only when reporting a change to a student's enrolment, or issuing a Section 20 notice. They do not currently enter on PRISMS the address for all students, although they would hold this information in their management systems.

The proposed change is a major increase in administrative workload; some typical ACPET member colleges with 200 – 1500 international students estimate the additional reporting will require up to an extra 1 FTE staff to fully comply. This in an environment of decreasing international student numbers and the subsequent shrinking of resources.

In regard to reporting changes and updating student data on PRISMS, this can currently only be done manually.

Reporting should use existing systems, modified as necessary, similar to the current Client Qualification Register reporting with the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) in South Australia or the interface of HEIMS with HEPCAT as the latter can already capture all the student data required for ESOS purposes.

Some smaller providers may not use automated systems that PRISMS could access; these providers may prefer to enter the information manually rather than invest in new data systems. For larger providers with potentially compatible systems, PRISMS needs to be updated to download automatically before the proposed reporting is enforced.

To assist in the upkeep of student records, we urge Government to implement Knight Report recommendation 31 to establish a single identifier to track students through their studies in Australia as soon as possible. In fact, we encourage Government to go further and extend such an identifier to domestic as well as to international students to facilitate meaningful data collection across all students and sectors, including tracking of students through various pathways.

In summary, ACPET:

1. Supports the Knight recommendations for the removal of mandatory visa cancellation
2. Supports in principle the provision of student contact details to DIAC, provided systems are in place to mitigate the administrative load on providers
3. Urges the Government to update PRISMS as a matter of urgency so that it is capable of downloading information directly from provider databases, without laborious manual entry
4. Encourages the establishment of a student identifier to track students, and provide better information and intelligence.

For any further enquiries, please contact
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