



SUBMISSION TO:  
SENATE EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS  
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE  
FOR THE INQUIRY INTO  
THE SERVICES FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS AMENDMENT  
(RE-REGISTRATION OF PROVIDERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2009

BY

**ISANA: International Education Association Inc.**

### **Summary**

The ISANA International Education Association makes the following four recommendations with regard to the Services for Overseas Student Amendment Bill 2009

- *That legislation be introduced that regulates onshore education agents who act on behalf of the students and their families rather the education provider.*
- *That legislation be introduced that regulates the roles of 'guardians' and 'guardianship agencies' in relation to the support and monitoring of international students under 18 years of age who are not accompanied by immediate family in Australia, especially in relation to education agents undertaking this role.*
- *That education providers be required to provide training and professional development for the agents associated with them or ensure that they have received such training and professional development elsewhere.*
- *That minimum support levels for international students need to be defined taking into account the way providers function in the various sectors. It could be defined in terms of a proportion of the income from students e.g. 10% of such income could be prescribed to go to support services.*

### **Industry History**

ISANA: International Education Association inc. is a voluntary organisation that has

provided services to international students and the professional staff who work with them since 1989. It is an organisation which is well known as a peak representative body, and plays a key role in the field of International Education in Australia.

ISANA is a membership-driven association with affiliations across a number of institutions and with student associations. Our members work in universities, colleges and schools as well as government and private organisations, in administration, support, compliance, policy, teaching and teaching support, in industry driven specialist areas, in management and some are international students themselves.

ISANA has productive relationships across all education sectors, educational groups, relevant government departments and long-standing relationships of support and cooperation with student organizations.

It has worked in collaboration with international education associations internationally to improve the capacities of professionals working in the field, and has contributed to a range of government and other consultative and advisory groups. One of our key functions is providing professional development and ISANA further supports its members with Special Interest Groups (SIG's), encouraging collaboration of professionals performing the same roles to identify best-practice and to develop initiatives such as the National Exchange Fair Circuit which promotes student mobility to Australian students and presents a united and professional front to partner institutions around the world placing Australia among the frontrunners in student mobility. ISANA has identified an increase in education agents and agencies joining the association and attending conferences and professional development activities with a view to provide a better and more responsible and informed service to their clients. ISANA has encouraged their displayed willingness to collaborate and contribute to the industry by earmarking an Agents Special Interest Group for 2009.

ISANA has had great success in recent years utilising the vast and varied experience and knowledge of its membership, developing products funded by Government grants which enhance the professional standing of members and non-members such as The National Code Transition Support Program; developing and enhancing the National Code Online Tutorial with the support of DEST funding in 2007 and more recently in 2008 with DEST/DEEWR funding to produce ESOS consumer protection awareness products developing the Student Education Project; Orientation Guidelines Template (Rainbow Guide) for institutions; and suite of animations to raise student awareness of their rights and responsibilities under the National Code 2007.

ISANA saw these projects as an opportunity to develop products that enhance industry standards and promote best-practice principals with Government support, and as a significant incentive to increase our services to members including the wider international education community across all sectors and importantly the students who drive the industry.

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### **Publication of the names of education agents who represent them and promote their education services**

ISANA is supportive of this move for education providers to publish the names of education agents who represent them and promote their education services but there are two aspects associated with the role of education agents which fall outside this process but need addressing.

While education providers do have established relationships with education agents, particularly agents overseas, who work for them on a regular basis and according to guidelines laid down by education provider, there are also agents, both onshore and offshore, who approach education providers representing a student and their family. In this case, the role of the agent in providing appropriate information about the education provider, the courses offered and educational and other conditions in Australia cannot be monitored and supported in the same way. These agents are outside the control of the education provider and paid by the student or their family. Any regulation of education agents must also regulate agents that act in this way and this cannot be the role of the education provide.

#### *Recommendation 1*

*That legislation be introduced that regulates onshore education agents who act on behalf of the students and their families rather the education provider.*

A large number of international students under 18 years of age live and study in Australia without the support and monitoring of immediate family members. The arrangements made to protect their personal safety and social well-being are left in the hands of the education providers. Neither the ESOS Act nor Standard 5 of the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007* make any mention of “guardians” in this process. In spite of this, a whole industry of “guardians” and “guardian agencies” has grown up in some cases with the support of education providers who handed this responsibility over to these people. Quite a number of education agents also act as “guardians” or as agents for “guardian agencies”. There are many problems with this system. Among these problems are

- a lack of knowledge of the Australian education system and how it works
- a lack of local knowledge by some of these agents
- a conflict of interest created by overlapping roles
- parents paying for services which are already provided by the education provider or the accommodation provider.

The use of homestay families in this guardianship role also has problems inherent in it.

#### *Recommendation 2*

*That legislation be introduced that regulates the roles of ‘guardians’ and*

*‘guardianship agencies’ in relation to the support and monitoring of international students under 18 years of age who are not accompanied by immediate family in Australia, especially in relation to education agents undertaking this role.*

Publishing the names of agents used will encourage education providers to be accountable for the information and advice given by agents to prospective students. One important aspect of this accountability is the provision by education providers of appropriate material to agents. This can be achieved quite simply. Another important aspect is the provision of training and professional development to these agents so that they fully understand and are kept up-to-date with all aspects of international education in an Australian environment.

*Recommendation 3*

*That education providers be required to provide training and professional development for the agents associated with them or ensure that they have received such training and professional development elsewhere.*

**Re-registration of all institutions currently on the Commonwealth Register of institutions and Courses for Overseas Students**

One area where the present registration process is deficient is in the area of student support. Standard 6.6 of the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007* states that “the registered provider must have sufficient support personnel to meet the needs of the students enrolled with the registered provider.” The definition of “sufficient” support to international students is not a simple matter. There are a number of sets of conditions and parameters that differ across education providers and types of courses and make the nature of the support provided and the need for accessibility of that support different in these different situations. Earlier this year, the ISANA International Education Association conducted a small survey among its members as to the level of specialized support provided to international students by their respective education providers. The results are contained in the table below.

**Table 1. Advisor to international student ratios.**

Sector	Number of responses from this sector	Range in international student numbers	Range in adviser to student ratio	Average adviser to student ratio
University campus (general) - >1000 int. studs.	Australia – 7 NZ – 2	1912 to 10,700	1;305.7 to 1:3200	1:1191.1
University campus (general) – < 1000 int. studs.	Australia – 4	4 to 300	1:10 to 1:300	1:122.5

Study Abroad & Exchange	Australia – 2	113 to 150	1:28.3 to 1:150	1:89.2
TAFE campus	Australia – 1 NZ – 2	116 to 1500	1:116 to 1:500	1:245.3
Private Providers	Australia – 4	420 to 5000	1:92.9 to 1:1250	1:396
English Language Schools	Australia – 2	450 to 860	1:59.2 to 1:245.7	1:152.5
Secondary Schools	Australia – 5 NZ – 1	15 to 75	1:15 to 1:22	1:18.3

The number of respondents to this survey was small and thus the results must be treated with caution. It should also be noted that those who responded were members of the ISANA International Education Association and were thus people who were interested in keeping up to date with the latest developments in the area and supporting others in similar work so that they could all do their work well. There would have been no responses from education providers who do not employ people to do this specialized work but rather rely instead on people whose main areas of expertise is elsewhere or do not employ anyone at all in this role.

The advisor to student ratio was difficult to establish in some sectors. In the secondary schools, the specific role of supporting international students is generally undertaken on a time allowance in conjunction with a teaching load. Secondary schools also have established pastoral care programs for all students and a culture of monitoring and supporting students because of the younger age of their students. Some schools have put in place specialized support programs such as “buddy” systems to help support their international students. In spite of these things, secondary schools still recognized the need to provide international students with specialized support and had the lowest advisor to international student ratio.

Study Abroad and Exchange programs had the second lowest advisor to international student ratio.

The nature of teaching in English language schools means that a limited number of teachers have fairly intensive contact with their international students. These schools sometimes therefore rely very heavily on the teachers to provide welfare support for their students. Better providers have found, however, that special session welfare-related sessions need to be scheduled if these teachers are adequately locate and understand problems being experienced by their students. Issues such as absenteeism and serious problems in the areas of accommodation, acculturation, relationships and mental illness need to be dealt with by specialized staff. The advisor to student ratio for English language schools was the fourth lowest.

The TAFE campuses had relatively small numbers of students and fairly consistent advisor to student ratios. The Private Providers had larger numbers of students and a wider range in their advisor to student ratios. University campuses were divided into those who had enrolled 1000 international students or fewer and those who had enrolled more than 1000 international students. University campuses

with smaller numbers of international students generally employed only 1 student advisor, sometimes on a fractional basis, but all the advisor to student ratios were 1:300 or less.

The situation is complicated in the universities who enrolled large numbers of international students. There has been a movement in recent years to remove specialized services for international students and to expect them to seek help alongside Australian students in the general counseling and support offices of the university. Some would say that encourages their mixing with Australian students and will help them to feel included as part of the university community. Whether this is true is debatable. It also runs contrary to the well documented specialized needs of international students and their different cultural approaches to help-seeking and counseling (the ISANA website [www.isana.org.au](http://www.isana.org.au) contains many papers from our annual conferences that spell out these specialized needs and cultural differences). It should also be remembered that International Student Advisors in these universities with larger international student enrollments must deal students from a wide variety of countries, cultural backgrounds, courses, ages, and stages in their study and their lives. It is very demanding work. Some the advisor to student ratios that were recorded for these universities seem to be extremely high and would not provide a situation where all students who needed the assistance of an advisor could be seen promptly and given sufficient time for their problems to fully exposed and dealt with adequately. The monitoring of the attendance of international students in classes is required in all sectors expect the higher education sector. Absence from class is a good indication that a problem might exist and assistance might be required by the student. In other sectors, monitoring of attendance is used as a valuable tool in the support of international students. As such monitoring does not occur in universities, it is important that support offered to international students is easily accessible and readily available.

#### *Recommendation 4*

*That minimum support levels for international students need to be defined taking into account the way providers function in the various sectors. It could be defined in terms of a proportion of the income from students e.g. 10% of such income could be prescribed to go to support services.*