

Opening Statement — Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee

Concerning The: Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024

Good morning Chair and members

The Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia welcomes the opportunity to speak to you once again on this Bill, thank you.

The fact that we're all here again highlights the flaws in the Bill. Beyond being poorly drafted insofar as it appears to contain some technical flaws, concerns remain that it will have an adverse impact on independent skills training and higher education providers. The end result will be job losses of hardworking Australians in the thousands.

In this context, ITECA welcomes this Committee's further examination of the inadequate arrangements for developing the details of this Bill. The absence of an assessment of the likely impact across the different areas of the sector it will affect and the as-yet-unknown implementation arrangements all merit significant further interrogation.

Independent providers in the skills training, higher education, and international education sectors need to be able to plan, invest, and grow with certainty and have a clear understanding of the regulatory environment in which they operate to operate commercially sustainable and protect the jobs of their employees.

Unfortunately, this ESOS Amendment Bill delivers none of these things and diminishes each of them in turn. Further, the Australian Government has managed to achieve this by making decisions on the fly, and without adequate consultation or advice to tertiary education institutions regarding its impact. That said, ITECA needs to highlight the positive way the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Australian Skills Quality Authority has engaged with us on this Bill; if only the same could be said of other stakeholders across the Australian Government.

Ends.

Delivered By:
Felix Pirie – ITECA Deputy Chief Executive

Check Against Delivery

ITECA Ref: N4.8.10 – 5 September 2024

Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia Limited
ABN 63 054 953 758

Street Address: Level 7 – 10 Hobart Place, Canberra, ACT, 2600
Postal Address: GPO Box 450, Canberra, ACT, 2601

t: 1300 421 017 f: 1300 421 018

e: ceo@iteca.edu.au

www.iteca.edu.au

Supplementary Advice — Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee

Concerning The: Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024

The substantial uncertainty regarding data source and use causes genuine concern among providers. For example, we have data for the number of international students from different Government agencies and none of them match or are consistent with each other. This Bill does not establish which data sources will be used nor precisely how they will be used. Instead, providers are subjected to what are opaque methods for determining future students – methods that cannot be repeated by providers when they using the same source Australian Government data.

This is an obscure mechanism to make seismic changes to a critical sector for the Australian economy; changes completely lacking transparency for both students and providers.

This is reckless and also dangerous for the long-term health of the independent skills training and higher education sectors.

The uncertainty surrounding the release of international student enrolment limits for 2025 for the skills training sector exemplify these issues. Decisions regarding visa policy, caps on student enrolment numbers, and other regulations have a direct impact on how independent skills training and higher education providers with a commitment to quality operate to support students.

Once again, however, there is a distinct lack of clarity from the Australian Government. While rumours of various levels of enrolment limits swirl, there is an absence of clear and accurate information.

This uncertainty makes it impossible for education providers to plan their intake, hire staff, upgrade or expand facilities. The result is hesitation, stagnation, and, ultimately, job losses.

The Australian Government should act as an enabler of business, not as its most significant hindrance.

Poor government decisions and decision making don't only threaten jobs in the immediate term; they undermine the sustainability of all independent skills training and higher education institutions that supported 57.4% of international student enrolments in Australia in 2023. The sector is now at a crossroads. Will politicians provide the certainty needed to allow the sector to grow and flourish in support of students who choose Australia? The alternative will be the undermining of Australia's tertiary education sector into the future, and the livelihoods of thousands of jobs in the sector.

Tabled By:
Felix Pirie – ITECA Deputy Chief Executive

Check Against Delivery