

Ian Aird, CEO of English Australia, the national peak body for the English Language teaching sector.

I thank the committee for this opportunity to present the concerns of English Australia and its members with respect to this Bill. Our members include university colleges, TAFEs, private colleges, and schools. Membership is exclusive to high quality colleges that go above and beyond the legislated minimum standards. Our members deliver 80% of all ELICOS.

This Bill has been drafted on the run, without meaningful consultation of those impacted, without consideration of its economic impact or the jobs it will cost, and without concern for students.

The Bill claims to be about quality and integrity. It does nothing to require, encourage, or incentivise quality. Instead, it will drive away investment in quality and drive away quality international students.

The Bill puts unprecedented power into the hands of the Minister whose decisions will have no requirement to follow a transparent procedure or to provide either evidence or reason. The likely result will be that instead of focusing on quality and integrity, educational institutions will need to focus on building political favour.

The context of this Bill is the government flipping almost overnight from encouraging rapid growth in the sector post covid, to desperately shrinking the sector pre-election. Since December last year, student visa applications have been refused at record levels and delayed at record levels. Visa grants from 1 January to 30 June for offshore applicants wanting to study English are down 60% on last year. These visa cuts alone will cost an estimated 15,000 jobs over the year.

But that wasn't bad enough, so on 1 July the student visa application fee was hiked 125%. It's now nearly double the visa fee required to study in the UK at Oxford University, triple the visa fee to study in the USA at Harvard University, nearly 10 times Canada's visa fee. Even worse, and unlike those competitor nations, an enrolment of only 4 months - the average for ELICOS – pays the same \$1600 as a higher ed enrolment of 4 years.

Most ELICOS colleges hadn't yet recovered financially from the COVID border closures. Many of our members tell us the current government has done more damage to their business in the last 6 months than COVID did.

And then this Bill. It's hard to understand how limits on visas came to be part of an education Bill. But it's equally hard to understand how this Bill gets it all so wrong.

From nonsensical definitions, to provisions purposefully written to avoid any right to appeal decisions made poorly, unfairly, or improperly, parts of this Bill will confuse, parts will be practically unenforceable, parts are economic self sabotage.

Part 8, for instance, gives the Minister unfettered power to remove courses from CRICOS, giving only 30 days' notice for all providers to eject all enrolled students. That's thousands of international students on the street overnight - no warning, compensation, or recourse. This will bankrupt organisations and cost thousands more Australian's their jobs. It will destroy all trust in Australia for future international students and cause lasting damage to Australia's reputation globally.

The government keep referring to the Nixon Review findings to justify the Bill's provisions. The Nixon Review revealed illegal behaviour and recommended law enforcement, not broad legislative change. Everything in the Nixon review, every 'shonk' and every 'ghost college' being used to attack the sector's social license and defend this

Bill – is all illegal already; it's all covered by existing legislation. We don't lack laws, we lack adequate enforcement of those laws.

But, instead of supporting better enforcement of existing laws, this Bill makes the Minister judge, jury and executioner and sidelines the regulator along with good governance and administrative justice.

The Minister said last week he doesn't want to turn a \$50billion dollar industry into a \$20billion dollar industry. Well, we're well on our way - 37% down in student visa grants by June 30, that's a \$10-15bil cut already, and that's before the impact of the visa fee increase is felt, and before this Bill.

Before this damage is irreversible, English Australia calls on the government to urgently change direction.