

Tasmanian Government
Submission to the Australian Senate

The Bill for an Act to amend the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000, and for related purposes; -

Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Re-registration of Providers and Other Measures) Bill 2009

Introduction

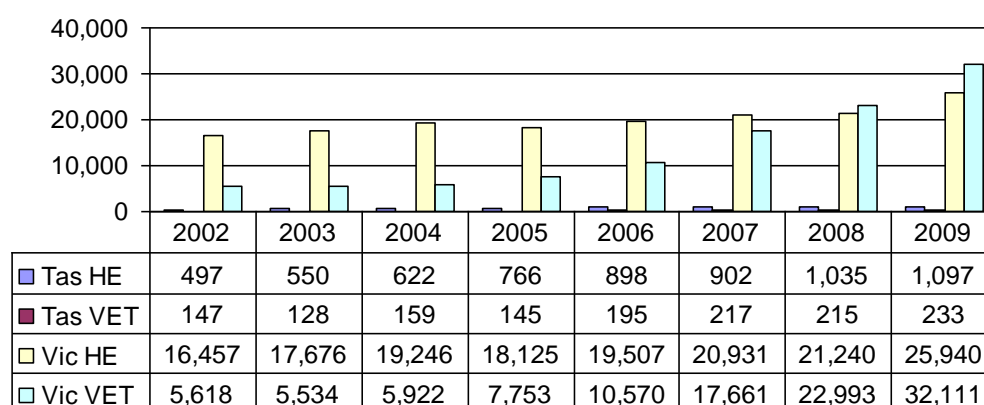
The Tasmanian Government welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee's inquiry into the Education Services Amendment (Re-Registration of Providers and Other Measures) Bill 2009.

Tasmania has only 19 institutions registered on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). There are 127 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) providing Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Tasmania¹. Of these only five are registered to deliver vocational training to overseas students: two public and three private institutions including two independent schools.² There is one CRICOS registration in Tasmania for all Government providers including Government schools, the Tasmanian Academy and the Tasmanian Polytechnic.

The rapid growth in international student enrolments in Australia over the last few years has been substantially in the private VET sector with an increase in enrolments nationally to 37%.³ Tasmania has a comparatively small but significant international student sector, contributing an estimated \$130 million to the State's economy in 2008.⁴ As at June 2009, there were 3,883 overseas students enrolled across the higher education, schools, vocational education and training, and English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS) sectors in the State. Approximately 60% of these students are enrolled at the University of Tasmania (UTAS).⁵

The table below shows that although growth has occurred in Tasmania, it has not been at the exponential rate of other states, with university enrolments remaining significantly higher than VET enrolments.

Comparative Growth in VET and HE Commencements for International Students in Tasmania and Victoria



¹ National Training Information Service

² Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students

³ Australian Education International, (AEI)

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 5368.0.55.004 International Trade in Services by Country, by State and by Detailed Services Category, Calendar Year, 2008.

⁵ AEI year to Date Enrolments by Sector for Tasmania as at June 2009.

Tasmania provides high quality education services to overseas students in schools, Polytechnic and University.

The small number of providers in the state ensures that the regulator, the Tasmanian Qualification Authority (TQA), is able to closely monitor, regulate and quality control education services.

Quality Tasmanian education services to overseas students can be partly attributed to a relatively small student population providing opportunity for better student support, better community engagement, smaller classes, individual attention and learning support. Tasmanian providers have low attrition rates and high levels of satisfaction from international students.

There are currently no providers in Tasmania who do not have education as their main purpose. Neither are there providers who do not have a record of proven ability in delivering quality education services.

The concerns emerging nationally relating to student welfare and quality of educational services are of concern to Tasmania. They have an impact on perceptions about providers and education agents operating in all Australian jurisdictions. There is also a risk that operators of concern in other Australian jurisdictions may choose to expand or move operations to Tasmania.

ESOS Amendment Bill

Re- registration of CRICOS registered institutions by 31 December 2010

Tasmania supports the re-registration of all CRICOS registered providers. Tasmania believes that effective regulation, adequate resources and commitment by regulators are required to ensure quality provision of education services to overseas students. The Commonwealth Minister has existing enforcement powers; allocating collected fees to enforcement could assist in taking action with providers as required.

The current regulatory framework for education providers requires institutions to meet the State or Territory and Commonwealth requirements for registration as an education provider. This includes the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and protocols for higher education and schools. CRICOS registration and the National Code provide further regulations to ensure quality services for international students.

The re-registration of all CRICOS providers including the new criteria may result in closure of a number of providers. This potential closure may result in large numbers of international students requiring support from the Tuition Assurance Scheme (TAS) as well as the possibility of requirement for more places in alternate courses than are currently available.

Registration requirement –The principle purpose of the provider is to provide education

Tasmania supports the addition of this registration criterion. However some providers may adapt their corporate structure to create a business division with the principle purpose of education whilst continuing to operate in other areas such as a migration or education agency. This additional criterion may also impact badly on

businesses currently providing quality services to overseas students as part of a broader portfolio.

Registration requirement – That the provider has demonstrated capacity to provide education of a satisfactory standard.

Tasmania supports the addition of this registration criterion for existing providers. However Tasmania believes this does not have a clear and useful meaning for start-up providers.

Subsection 21A – Providers to keep and publish list of education agents with whom they deal.

The role of education agents is very important in selection of destination, provider and course for international students. Provision of accurate information is paramount to the eventual satisfaction level of students.

Australia's migration policy is also intrinsically linked to demand for education services for international students. Some education agents have played a role in misinterpreting or misrepresenting Australian migration policy in their recruitment activities.

Tasmania supports publication of education agents engaged by providers, and further would support the development of a national register and selection criteria for education agents.