



Go8 SUBMISSION  
SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE WELFARE  
OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Group of Eight (Go8) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate's inquiry into international student welfare.

Together the Go8 universities are the institutions of choice for around one third (33.7%) of all international students and over half of all international higher degree by research (HDR) students enrolled in universities in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Their contribution to scholarship, campus life, and more broadly to Australia's multicultural society is highly valued by all Go8 Vice-Chancellors.

While focusing specifically on the welfare of international students, this Senate inquiry also provides an opportunity to reconsider the role of international education in Australia.

Recent incidents involving violence against students need urgent attention. The Australian Government must be involved in tightening accreditation of Higher Education Providers (HEPs) and their overseas recruitment agents, particularly in the private VET sector, to safeguard student welfare as well as protect the reputation of the quality providers in the Australian education system.

These incidents, however, also provide an opportunity to reflect on Australia's lack of preparedness for mature participation in the global knowledge society. In many parts of the world we are perceived to be narrow, unsophisticated, complacent, ignorant and monolingual. If these perceptions are not countered, our ability to create and sustain vital international links could be eroded.

International education needs to move into a new phase. A phase in which we no longer argue over the one-sided financial "value" of the international education export industry but instead appreciate and facilitate its reciprocal benefits such as educating Australians to understand, respect and value cultural diversity at home and abroad.

Any aspirations Australia might have for leadership in the Asian region will be undermined by a failure to address the need to renew our understanding of where we are and our ability to engage more seriously at an international level.

### **Distinguishing features of Go8 universities**

The Go8 is a coalition of leading Australian universities, comprehensive in general and professional education and distinguished by depth and breadth in research.

Go8 universities can be distinguished in the following ways:

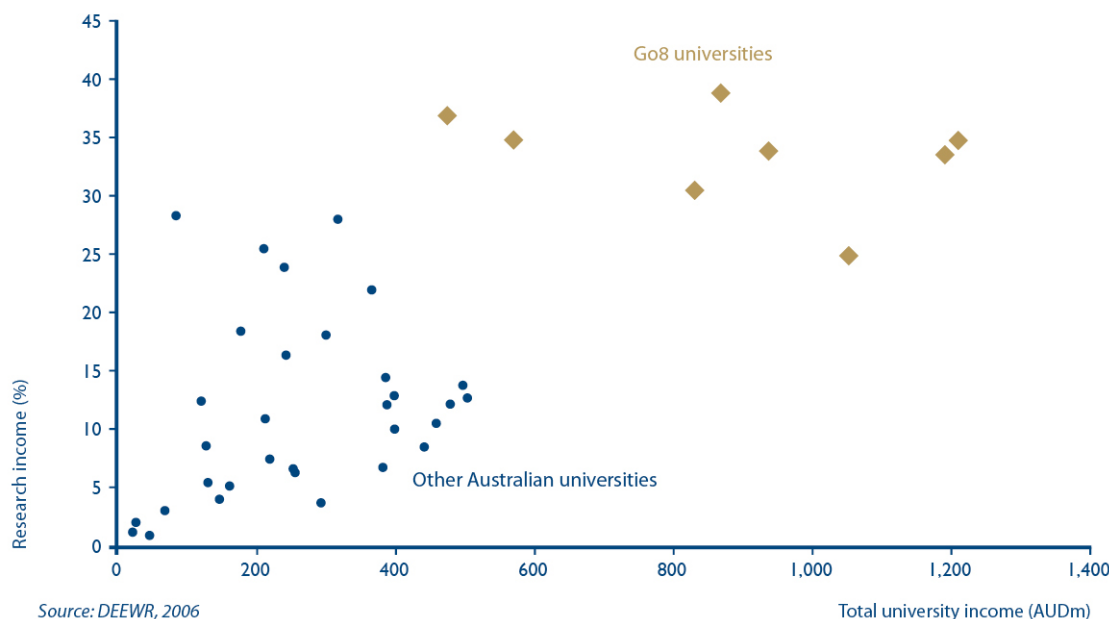
- they are the most research concentrated of all Australian universities (refer to Figure 1 below);
- they have nurtured every Nobel prize winner educated at an Australian university;
- they contribute over 70 per cent of the Fellows of the four Australian learned academies;
- they enrol over half of all higher degree by research students (50.6%)<sup>2</sup>;
- they hold over 90 per cent of US patents for inventions and generate 80 per cent of spin-off companies created by Australian universities;
- they account for 72 per cent of university sector income from investments, 78 per cent of income from donations and bequests and more than half of total university assets.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government's PRISMS database comprising year-to-date international enrolments and year-to-date international commencements, April 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government's PRISMS database comprising year-to-date international enrolments and year-to-date international commencements, April 2009.

**Figure 1: Research income as a percentage of total Australian university income**



## THE NEXT PHASE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

### Internationalisation

Australia has a global obligation to make our capacities available to help other countries provide for the education of their populations where they lack the internal capacity to do so. In the process Australia can benefit from the cross-interactions that improve our understandings of cultural diversity, build relationships of importance and connect us with the next generation of the world's knowledge producers. In other words, Australia needs international education for its own development just as other countries need access to Australia's education system for their development.

For international students, quality education in Australia develops the skills to achieve rewarding career paths. In turn, international students contribute intellectually and provide diverse perspectives that enrich the educational experience for Australian students. International HDR students in particular contribute to the country's research and innovation agenda and constitute an important part of ongoing international research networks.

The Go8 universities have a strong commitment to internationalisation, a concept which includes an international focus in the curriculum, international research collaboration, building links with other countries and providing a rich cultural experience for all students including opportunities for student and staff exchange.

In addition to the considerable efforts by individual Go8 member universities such as international campuses, research collaboration, staff and student exchange programs with over 60 countries, membership of international networks such as Universitas 21, IARU, APRU and the World Universities Network, international engagement initiatives undertaken by the Go8 as a group include:

- The Go8-Germany research exchange collaboration, a joint initiative of the Go8 and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which aims to foster research collaboration of the highest quality between Australia and Germany (cost to Go8 universities of \$1.5 million over three years);

- The Go8 European Fellowships which recognise the importance of international contacts for early career researchers and aim to help establish those contacts in Australia for talented young researchers from emerging European economies (cost: \$160,000 per year);
- A Memorandum of Understanding with the leading research universities in China, known as the C9 based on strengthening ties through joint PhD programs, joint summer schools, student and post-doctoral exchange and development programs;
- Scholarships for the students and researchers in the city of L'Aquila, Italy following the devastation caused by an earthquake in April 2009;
- The Go8- University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) Collaboration Project to contribute to staffing gaps in key disciplinary areas of UPNG's academic and research programs;
- A Go8 European Liaison Office in Europe focused on increasing the Go8's research collaboration opportunities;
- A joint conference with Harvard University and the C9 universities in April 2010 which will bring together 40 graduate students from Australia, China, and the US - leaders of the next generation - to present their global perspectives on climate and climate change from three very different national bases;
- India-Australia workshops on research in water resources engineering – a joint initiative of the Go8 deans of engineering and the Indian Institutes of Technology;
- Go8 Languages Other Than English (LOTE) incentives which recognise that competence in other languages is increasingly important for effective participation in a globalised world.

### **Differentiation**

In a recent speech, ANU Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ian Chubb, outlined just some of the differences that exist between institutions that bear the university title in Australia.

“According to 2007 data, one university admits more than 50% of its school leaver commencing students with tertiary entrance rank scores above 95, while another admits more than 50% with tertiary entrance rank scores below 50. One university has 90% of its academic staff active in research while another has less than 3% active in research. The proportion of academic staff with a Doctorate in 2008 varies from a low of 33% to nearly 82% at the highest, with the average near 64%. One university devotes in excess of 85% of its budget to research-related activities while another spends less than 5% on research. One university has 30% of its enrolments in graduate programs and 15% in research higher degrees, while another has 7% in graduate programs and less than 1% in research higher degrees.”<sup>3</sup>

The composition of the student body is another important factor of a truly international education in Australia and a significant point of differentiation between institutions. In choosing Australia as a study destination, it is safe to assume that international students want to study with Australian students. While some universities and VET providers rely heavily or exclusively on international student enrolments and income, enrolment of international students at Go8 universities ranges from a low of 13.8% of the student body to a high of 23.7%,<sup>4</sup> ensuring that international students will experience a learning environment that is culturally varied but dominantly Australian.

This level of institutional diversity needs to be transparent to potential students to assist them in making important choices about their study destination.

Regrettably Australia has failed to draw attention to institutional differences in promoting “Brand Australia” as an export industry. While we proudly project an image of elite sports achievement we avoid projecting an image of elite intellectual achievement. Education marketing is levelled down to focus on “lifestyle” factors which are inherently anti-intellectual.

The different strengths of institutions are masked by a generic Brand Australia message that all institutions are of an equally “good” standard. A more useful approach would be for government authorities to emphasise that all education providers are bound by law to meet a minimum standard as

<sup>3</sup> “Research universities and Australia’s place in world”, Professor Ian Chubb, Speech to the Lowy Institute, 29.7.09

<sup>4</sup> DEEWR, Students 2006 [full year]: selected higher education statistics

required under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), while also pointing to objective data such as student support services, rankings, learning and teaching awards and competitive research income to demonstrate those providers that perform at a higher level.

In recent years, Brand Australia has also been too closely linked with easy access to permanent residency, particularly in certain countries such as India. There has been too little protection of the “Study in Australia” brand developed and endorsed by Government, which means students might wrongly assume an unscrupulous provider or agent using the brand is working within the Government’s regulatory framework.

### Government funding for higher education

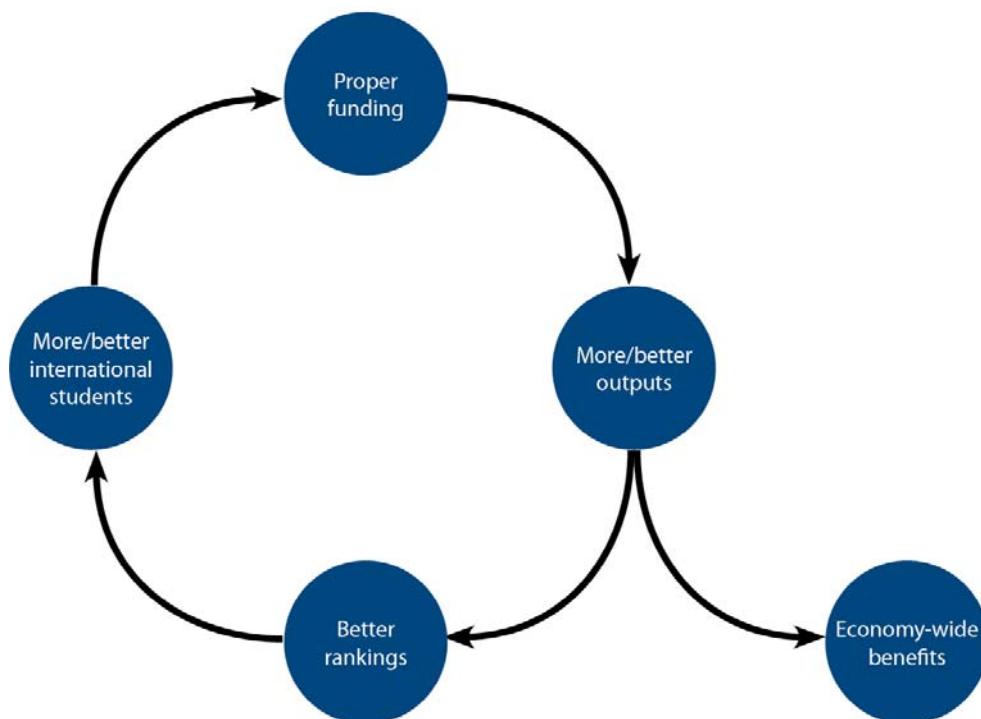
This inquiry provides the Australian Parliament an opportunity to examine the appropriateness of government funding for Australian universities as it relates to international education.

Over the past two decades, Australian universities have become increasingly reliant on student fees and other private funds for their operating expenses. The income from international students is often not available to reinforce internationalisation efforts as it has to cover for shortfalls in government funding for teaching and infrastructure.

The Go8 has welcomed the 2009 Budget initiatives to increase the level of government funding for higher education. However, the fact remains that less than 50% of Australian university revenue now comes from government sources, making Australian universities among the least dependent on government funding in the OECD.<sup>5</sup>

The figure below represents the benefits of adequate levels of public funding for universities including better research outputs leading to better rankings and the ability to attract the best quality international students.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2: Research – a virtuous circle**



<sup>5</sup> Education at a Glance 2008, OECD INDICATORS, p 254.

<sup>6</sup> “Economic rationalism, social purpose and higher education” conference presentation by Professor Fred Hilmer, UNSW Vice-Chancellor, 10 March 2009.

## Go8 STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

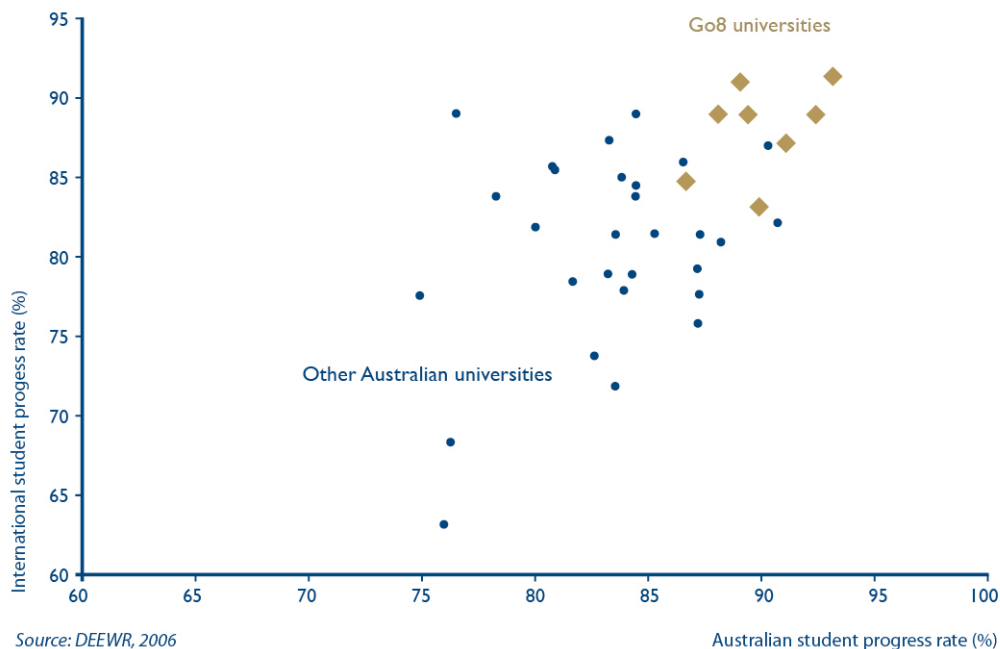
Go8 Vice-Chancellors are committed to providing a high level of support services to all students to help ensure their academic success and maximise their involvement in the university community.

All Go8 member universities have designated support units for international students, providing personalised advice and a wide range of educational, social and recreational activities.

Go8 universities require international students to have a high level of competence in English before they are accepted and enrolled. A minimum IELTS score of 6.5 is required for most programs and for law and medicine and some postgraduate programs, the minimum score is set at 7.0 or higher. International students are also required to provide certified evidence of academic qualifications equivalent to those required by domestic students before they are accepted.

The combination of setting high entry standards and providing a broad range of quality support services ensures that international students succeed at a similarly high level as domestic students in Go8 universities (see Figure 3 below).

**Figure 3: Comparing international and Australian student progress rates**



Group of Eight universities provide free pre-departure briefings to international students in many countries. On arrival, upon enrolment and throughout a student's academic career, a wide range of support services are available. A small selection of these services is outlined below.

### The Australian National University

[http://info.anu.edu.au/studyat/International\\_Office](http://info.anu.edu.au/studyat/International_Office)

- Accommodation in a university hall, affiliated college or approved university accommodation is guaranteed to all first year undergraduate students from outside the ACT region. This guarantee includes international students.
- International students are met on arrival in Canberra by senior students and driven to their accommodation.
- A mentoring program provides an opportunity for new students to link up with later year students and learn from their knowledge and experience of campus life.
- A family support program includes English language classes for spouses and incorporates childcare and social activities for families.
- Speak Everyday English Classes run by senior Australian students are designed to encourage international students to think and argue in English in an informal environment.

- International Student Financial Assistance grants of up to \$3000 and supermarket vouchers of \$100 are available to students in financial hardship.

### **The University of Western Australia**

<http://www.international.uwa.edu.au/>

- International students are met at the airport and taken to their accommodation
- Prior to arrival students receive a pre-departure guide which covers comprehensive information for preparation, arrival, living and studying in Australia. This guide is also available online.
- Short-term loans are available to international students to overcome urgent unexpected expenses.
- A mentoring and peer support network assists first year students with their transition to university life.
- A transition program is offered to all commencing students who are new to Perth.
- An intercultural friendship program is open to all postgraduates and staff.

### **The University of Melbourne**

<http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/international/>

- An online service is in place for new students to make contact with each other all over the world before they leave home.
- On arrival, students are collected from the airport and delivered safely to their accommodation.
- Orientation programs address the transition issues of studying and living in a new country and culture.
- Safety information is presented to new students while current students receive email reminders through e-newsletters.
- Free lunches are organised to help students from countries with relatively small representation on campus meet each other and build and maintain networks within the university community.

### **The University of Queensland**

<http://www.uq.edu.au/international-guide/>

The online International Student Handbook is an invaluable guide for students who come from all over the world to study at UQ. This handbook is based on questions that have arisen from international students and provides current information on studying, living and enjoying life in Queensland. The website provides essential and up-to-date information to students as they progress through the cycle of experiences in their time as students in Australia. This cycle includes *Planning Your Arrival*, *Arriving at UQ*, *Studying at UQ*, *Living in Brisbane*, and *Completing your Studies*. The dynamic design of the website allows easy navigation and access to each element of the cycle as it becomes relevant to the students.

### **The University of New South Wales**

<http://www.international.unsw.edu.au/future/futurehome.html>

- An online advice service is available to all prospective international students.
- An arrivals desk at Sydney Airport is open for a number of weeks at the start of each semester.
- Information packs are available on the UNSW website about preparation, arrival and living in Sydney.
- Student lounge and group meeting facilities with free internet access are available.
- The university regularly runs returning home seminars and career workshops.
- The university's Learning Centre, provides a range of services including individual writing consultations, academic skills workshops, a resource library and online academic skills resources.

## **The University of Adelaide**

<http://www.international.adelaide.edu.au/support/isc/>

- A Meet and Greet service is provided on arrival in Adelaide with transport to accommodation.
- International students can participate in an extensive orientation program conducted over a two week period prior to the commencement of each semester. All activities are designed to help students establish a home in Adelaide, gain knowledge of relevant university and community based services and develop skills necessary to meet academic demands.
- Prior to the commencement of orientation and arrival in Adelaide, all new international students are invited to join a social media site hosted by staff and peer mentors. The site allows for discussions as new students prepare to leave their home countries.
- Upon arrival, students are welcomed by peer mentors at the Welcome Centre and during orientation the team of peer mentors hosts daily social events and activities both on and off-campus.
- Morning tea is provided at the International Student Centre every Friday during teaching periods to allow international and local students to meet with each other and with staff.

## **Monash University**

<http://www.monash.edu/international/currentstudents/>

- Monash Health, Wellbeing and Development staff are located on all Monash campuses. They provide free, confidential support and advice to all students on family, housing, financial, religious/spiritual, emotional, physical and psychological issues.
- Assistance with arranging permanent accommodation in Melbourne is provided.
- A website operates for international students who want to maintain or improve their English language skills.

## **The University of Sydney**

<http://www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/issu/>

- An arrivals desk is open at Sydney Airport for a number of weeks at the start of each semester.
- The university runs daily arrival information sessions on topics such as health cover, banking, taxation, transport, campus services and enrolment.
- The university runs housing information sessions and faculty information sessions.
- Free, confidential counselling is available to international students and their families.
- The university runs a program for the partners of international students to help them develop English language skills, meet new people, take part in social activities and discuss any problems.
- Orientation programs include safety briefings by the University Security Services and safety forums are held monthly.



## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Australian education system is made up of some very high quality public and private institutions which are genuinely committed to the welfare and academic success of all students.

To protect the reputation of these institutions and to ensure that international students receive a quality education in a safe environment in Australia, it is urgent that efforts are now made to rid the system of unsatisfactory providers. It is also necessary to develop a different and differentiated approach to promoting Australian education internationally.

For the purposes of this Senate Inquiry, the Go8's recommendations will focus on issues that relate directly to ensuring the flow of accurate information to potential students, the regulation of providers and their agents and on funding high quality student support services.

However, the Go8 believes that while Australia has been very successful in attracting international fee paying students over the past two decades, the time to recognise and embrace the reciprocal benefits of internationalisation in education is long overdue.

### **Recommendation 1: A priority role for TEQSA**

Current government consultation on the role of TEQSA suggests that it will have a key role in ensuring minimum standards, as outlined by the strengthened AQF, are met by all education providers accredited in Australia.

“The new quality assurance arrangements will ensure that domestic and international students have better information about how our higher education institutions are performing and that taxpayers can see whether value for money is being delivered and the national interest is being well served.”<sup>7</sup>

The Go8 strongly recommends that TEQSA be given a priority role in ridding the Australian system of unsatisfactory providers, through tighter accreditation and closer monitoring arrangements including responsibility for a national system for management of the Education Services for Overseas Students Act (ESOS), CRICOS regimes and the National Code.

State governments have demonstrated different interpretations of legal requirements under ESOS and an overall lack of interest in enforcing the Code. Their resources should be transferred to TEQSA so a consistent regulatory approach can be applied nationally.

Consideration could also be given to a TEQSA rating for all HEPs based on the quality of service provided to all students. This would serve as an important tool for students in differentiating the range of institutions available in Australia.

### **Recommendation 2: Changes in immigration law**

The Go8 supports the Australian Government's recent decisions to:

- introduce a “job readiness test” for graduates applying for permanent residency<sup>8</sup>
- increase the need for relevant work experience and language skills and reduce the reliance on the Migration Occupations Demand List (MODL).<sup>9</sup>

These changes represent a step in the right direction towards dismantling the widely held perception in some countries that enrolling in a tertiary education program related to a skill listed on the MODL is all that is required to access permanent residency in Australia. They should also increase the level of accountability of private VET providers to their students.

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<sup>7</sup> *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p31

<sup>8</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 21 July 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/evans-vows-to-tighten-study-rules-20090720-dqwi.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09063.htm>

### **Recommendation 3: Overseas recruitment agents**

Group of Eight universities take their responsibilities under the ESOS Act very seriously. The ESOS Act, and particularly the tuition assurance scheme, is one of the many positive features of the Australian system.

All Go8 universities publicly list on their websites the names and contact details of their overseas representatives.<sup>10</sup> Go8 universities also regularly review the professionalism and competence of their overseas recruitment agents. Go8 universities will neither accept students from nor remunerate agents with whom they do not have a signed contract. This helps to ensure that agents representing Go8 universities provide accurate information to potential students.

The Go8 recognises that one area of weakness in the current system is that management of recruitment agents is the responsibility of the institutions which engage them. Institutions which are highly reliant upon income derived from the students recruited by these agents have no incentive to monitor their behaviour or cancel a contract when unscrupulous behaviour occurs.

The Go8 supports the Government's proposed amendment to the ESOS legislation which will require all HEPs to "publish a list of education agents they work with to help to reinforce providers' accountabilities under the National Code of the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* and act as a disincentive to the use of disreputable education agents by providers." The Go8 universities already comply with this requirement and will be pleased to see other universities and VET providers brought into line with this practice.

In addition the Go8 recommends that the upcoming Government Review of the ESOS Act should explore options for:

- a system of Australian Government testing and registration of overseas agents and compulsory, regular reviews of the competence and professionalism of such agents;
- requiring overseas agents engaged by Australian institutions to have an affiliated partner organisation in Australia with a breach of regulations by either party leading to deregistration of both organisations.

### **Recommendation 4: Differentiation in the marketing of Australian education**

The Go8 recommends that the Australian government authorities charged with responsibility for marketing Australian education internationally be given the flexibility to promote a differentiated system. Information on the strengths and weaknesses of the system, based on objective data, should be made available to potential students. This should include relevant student and income data for each HEP in addition to information about institutions which have made genuine efforts at incorporating internationalisation in their missions. TEQSA will play an important role in providing the objective data. A differentiated approach to marketing would ultimately lead to better informed students and less reliance on unscrupulous agents.

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<sup>10</sup> [http://info.anu.edu.au/studyat/International\\_Office/getting\\_in/agents](http://info.anu.edu.au/studyat/International_Office/getting_in/agents);  
<http://offshore.unimelb.edu.au/OverseasReps.aspx>; <http://www.international.adelaide.edu.au/offshore/reps/>;  
[http://www.msr.monash.edu.au/monash\\_agents/](http://www.msr.monash.edu.au/monash_agents/); [http://www.international.unsw.edu.au/contacts/contactrep\\_offices.html](http://www.international.unsw.edu.au/contacts/contactrep_offices.html);  
<http://www.uq.edu.au/international/index.html?page=18255>;  
<http://www.studyat.uwa.edu.au/undergrad/international/apply/agents>  
<http://www.usyd.edu.au/internationaloffice/agents/index.php>

**Recommendation 5: Safety and student living costs**

Two simple reforms would make a significant and positive difference in the daily lives of international students.

1. The current requirement by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) that students from countries at certain assessment levels must demonstrate access to a minimum of \$12,000 per year for the duration of their studies leads to confusion and erroneous assumptions by international students and their families about the actual cost of living in Australia. As a result, after arrival in Australia, many students must work more than they may have expected in order to manage day-to-day expenses. The Go8 recommends that DIAC's minimum financial requirements for student visas be reviewed and revised upwards to better represent the actual cost of living in Australian capital cities. Ensuring access to adequate resources in advance will allow students to concentrate on their studies once here, reduce their reliance on work in unsatisfactory conditions and reduce the incidence of travel alone late at night.

2. Public transport concessions should be granted to all full-time students, regardless of their international or domestic status. Not only would this signal to international students that they are a valued part of the Australian community, but those students who choose to work after hours will have access to an affordable mode of transport which is safer than walking or cycling home alone.

**Recommendation 6: Adequate levels of government funding**

Over the past two decades, Australian universities have become increasingly reliant on student fees and other private funds for their operating expenses. The income from international students is often not available for internationalisation efforts because it has to cross-subsidise for shortfalls in government funding for teaching and infrastructure.

The Senate inquiry, along with the Baird Inquiry of the ESOS Act and associated regulatory and legislative frameworks, should examine the adequacy of government funding for Australian universities, with a view to reducing reliance on international student fee income for base operation.