



australian  
nursing federation

## Inquiry into the welfare of International Students

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## INTRODUCTION

The Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students.

The ANF is the national union for nurses in Australia with branches in each state and territory. The ANF is also the largest professional nursing organisation in Australia. The ANF's core business is the industrial and professional representation of nurses and nursing in Australia.

The ANF's 170,000 members are employed in a wide range of enterprises in urban, rural and remote locations in the public, private and aged care sectors, including hospitals, health services, schools, universities, the armed forces, statutory authorities, local government, offshore territories and industries.

The ANF participates in the development of policy in nursing, nursing regulation, health, community services, veterans affairs, education, training, occupational health and safety, industrial relations, immigration and law reform.

The ANF supports the comprehensive submissions of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and seeks, by this submission, to address specific issues affecting international students undertaking nursing studies or alternatively working in a nursing sector during their time in Australia as an international student.

We note that there appears to be a general view that the regulatory framework regarding the training and employment of international students has failed to keep up with the burgeoning growth in student numbers. This is a view shared by the ANF.

While official numbers of international students working in the health and community services sectors are not available, there is anecdotal evidence that growing numbers of international students are being engaged to work in the private residential aged care sector. Many of these students are undertaking non-nursing courses. International students are normally employed as Assistants in Nursing or Personal Care Workers where there is no requirement to demonstrate minimum qualifications or previous experience.

The ANF is concerned about the growth in international students providing care for the frail and elderly. This concern is heightened when one also has regard to the overall increase in unregulated employment in the residential aged care sectors.

In relation to term of reference (a)(vi) (employment rights and protection from exploitation), the ANF has seen the ACTU submissions on this point and supports its analysis and recommendations. The ANF considers that international students, like other temporary migrants including workers on 457 visas, are more likely to be dependent on employers than other workers, and are thus more likely to be exploited at work.

In relation to terms of reference (a)(iv) (student visa requirements) and (vii) (pathways to permanency), the ANF notes that many international students of nursing in Australia go on to achieve permanency residency and be registered, and work as, a nurse here.

However there can be deficiencies in the English-language skills of some international students undertaking Australian nursing courses who later seek to work in Australia as a nurse.

While a IELTS of 6 (or 5.5) is sufficient to obtain a student visa, nurses' registration boards have a IELTS requirement of 7 to be registered as a nurse.

Despite studying in Australia, there have been reports that the English-language skills of some working nurses, who were previously international students studying in Australia, are inadequate. This has led nursing boards to recently commence testing that the English-language skills of international students who studied in Australia are at IELTS7 level. Boards had previously assumed that because they had studied here, their English would be satisfactory.

Despite having sufficient English-language skills to study in Australia, the English language skills of some nursing students will not necessarily be sufficient to practise as a nurse. Some students coming to Australia with an expectation of permanent residency and to work as a nurse will accordingly be disappointed, especially if the study was marketed to them by migration agents as a means of obtaining permanent residency.

Accordingly, the ANF recommends that the IELTS requirements for students intending to study nursing courses be increased to 7.

This would also have the beneficial side-effect of assisting to reduce exploitation of nursing students in the workplace because lack of language skills increases dependence on others including employers, and makes it more difficult for students to know of their rights and to enforce them.