

# SUBMISSION 36



Department of Education and Training  
Government of Western Australia

D06/12292

The Committee Secretary  
Standing Committee on Economics,  
Finance and Public Administration  
Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

**Attention: Mr Andrew McGowan**

Dear Mr McGowan,

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration inquiry into the current and future directions of Australia's service industries.

Please find attached the Western Australian Department of Education and Training submission.

Yours sincerely

*Original signed*

PAUL ALBERT  
DIRECTOR GENERAL

Att.

# **SUBMISSION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING WESTERN AUSTRALIA TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS, FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA SERVICES INDUSTRIES**

The Submission relates to the following Term of Reference:

- The tourism and education service sectors - with the focus on the education sector.

## **1.0 Background**

Education and Training International (ETI) was established to take strategic responsibility for international activity in the West Australian Government schools, senior colleges and TAFE colleges. It maximises recruitment of international students into schools and colleges; develops strategic directions for onshore and off shore activity including international projects and establishes key strategic international relationships.

Currently there are 2 300 international students enrolled in schools and colleges. The Department is actively involved in off shore projects.

## **2.0 Key Challenges**

### **2.1 Visa Fees**

While it is appreciated that fees should be collected from overseas students to off set the administration costs of DIMA to process visa, consideration must be given to the effect these will have on the market when arriving at the costs.

The education is a key export industry for Australia. Its status as an industry must at times be considered when establishing costs. Consideration to market forces is sought.

Australian providers are currently losing to major competitors such as Canada, New Zealand and the USA because of costs of student visas and the time taken to process visas.

### **2.2 The Media**

Parents of overseas School sector students are usually attracted to Australia because of the high quality of the general education. This confidence can be quickly eroded with negative headlines and sometimes ill informed debate in Australian newspapers.

This is an issue that related in the main to the print media. What is recognised as “opinion” in Australia can be misconstrued by as “fact” or “expert advice” when reproduced in newspapers overseas. The lack of balance in newspaper reporting on education standards has had a detrimental effect on some overseas markets.

The situation is further exacerbated when both Commonwealth and State Governments are involved in quality of education debates. The unintentional outcomes of such debates are parents/students turning to other countries for education.

### 2.3 Greater Cohesion and Support for Projects

Western Australia would welcome a more cohesive approach to, and greater support by, the Commonwealth for State activities in education exports.

The provision of a better way of delivering faster access to market intelligence for offshore education project opportunities in both aid related and commercial areas is sought. Little is done to bring knowledge of commercial opportunities into a collective arena and most opportunities are identified through a process of discovery. Whilst the “pipeline” process for aid projects in particular can be lengthy, the time provided to actually submit tenders is generally too short to allow preparation of well-thought-out proposals that could position Australian providers more competitively in the global forefront.

Processes should be in place to ensure there is a priority in aid related activities for funds to remain in Australia through Australian owned managing contractors rather than allowing internationally based managing contractors to gain too large a slice of the Aid funding. This will increase the ability for Australian organisation to become competitive.

Easier access to Commonwealth support is also needed in the development of skills related to conducting business in education exports. An increase in the availability and variety of development programs on bidding and access to knowledge of the Aid “Pipeline” is required.

### 2.4 DIMA Language Requirements

The international student market is very sensitive to internal debates and delays in policy etc. within Australia. It should not be underestimated the effect of indecision, inconsistent advice and ongoing debates have on the international market. In many cases the “face” of Australia significantly advantages major competitors.

In the School Sector there has been a significant reduction in enrolments from China. Over two and a half years ago DIMA introduced a requirement that students reach a desired standard on an IELTS test. This caused concern in the Sector at the time because IELTS was, and still is, an inappropriate test for school students as it is a test designed initially for postgraduate and the redesign for undergraduate students.

DIMA allowed a two year waiver under certain conditions and for other approved tests to be used. This caused wide spread confusion in China and resistance from the students to comply with any sort of testing. Chinese school students found it easier to enrol in other countries. The situation is still not resolved, and the waiver is still in place and Chinese students that do come to Australia are achieving English at the school level.

While the need for quality checks to be in place is seen as necessary and desirable, consultation with the industry prior to announcements rather than after the event is essential.

### 2.5 Strong Australian dollar

Cost is a key factor when students and or parents are making decisions regarding which country to study. Canada, USA and New Zealand are seen to be less expensive in the current market in the English speaking world because of the strength of the Australian dollar.

## 2.6 Overseas Governments Policies

Some countries prefer to keep their young people in country for as long as possible and legislate for this to occur. These countries usually have a strong requirement for quality English programs. This provides the potential for growth in off shore deliver.

## 2.7 Difficulties with Visa Processing

The time taken to process a student visa into Australia does not compare favourably with other key competitors such as Canada, and New Zealand. The cost is also more expensive.

The country risk levels provided by DIMA are not consistent across sectors providing difficulties for students when progressing from one education sector to another and confusion for education agents and students/parents.

## 2.8 Recognition of Australian Qualification in the Students' Home Countries

The lack of mutual recognition with other countries is a key concern in all sectors but particularly in the VTE sector. Students having completed their studies in Australia may find their qualification have no status when they return home.

A valuable exercise to assist the education service export in the VTE sector would be the mapping of AQF to certification frameworks in other countries.

## 2.9 Refocussing on the education services

Traditionally the main focus on the education export market is upon academic programs particularly the tertiary i.e. university levels. Greater recognition should be made to the contribution of the school, ELICOS and VTE sectors in the international education markets.

Similarly much greater emphasis needs to be placed on other education products other than academic programs. Australia is rich in other educational field such as pedagogy, curriculum products, assessment tools, school management, performance review etc. and these need to be promoted.

## 2.10 Promotion of the Export of Education Services that underpin Australia's quality education

Greater emphasis must be placed on accreditation, certification and quality assurance processes that are in place across all education sectors both nationally and in specific states. Overseas employers should have the same confidence in graduates' qualifications as their Australian colleagues.

## 2.11 Free Trade Agreements

Greater focus in education and training as an export industry should be made in all Free Trade negotiations. It would be important to involve key stake holders in discussions prior to these negotiations.

### **3.0 Positive Steps**

DEST have undertaken a number of project initiatives that have the potential to both grow the international students market and ensure greater quality control. These include:

#### **3.1 The Transnational Quality Strategy.**

The strategy focuses on “ensuring the high quality and integrity of Australian education and training regardless of the location in which it is delivered”. This strategy is timely and when fully implemented regain market confidence and give Australia a competitive edge.

#### **3.2 Market Research Reports**

DEST through AEI has commissioned a number of very comprehensive market research reports in key countries where growth is anticipated. There are very valuable tools for providers across all sectors.

#### **3.3 The Education Agent Training Course**

Education Agents play a key role in the recruitment of international students. Unfortunately in the past it has been difficult to ensure the training they receive is of a consistent standard. DIMA and DEST (AEI) have collaborated to develop an online training package that is “specially designed to support individuals working as education agents”. Providers will now have confidence in recommending agents undertake the course and in appointing agents who can indicate they have completed the training.

#### **3.4 Australia School Sector Strategy**

DEST has commissioned the development of a School Strategy. To date a report has been presented on the current situation. This report will inform and guide the development of the Strategy.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

The Department of Education and Training is seeking:

- Consistency in policy and in decision making processes across key Departments involved in the education industry.
- Clarity of information and terminology provided to key players ranging from potential students, providers, parents etc.
- Recognition and acknowledgement of education in all its facets as a major source of revenue to Australia.

Collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders from Commonwealth and State Departments, education providers and industries that benefit from international students (real estate, car sales, airlines, hotels).