



WOLLONGONG UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL STUDENTS' SOCIETY

21 April 2013

Ms Amanda Rishworth MP, Member for Kingston SA
Chair
House of Representative's Standing Committee on Education and Employment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT
2600

RE: Inquiry into Higher Education Support Amendment (Asian Century) Bill 2013

Dear Ms Rishworth MP,

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Inquiry. This submission is made on behalf of the Wollongong University Medical Students' Society.

As a requirement of their degree, fourth year medical students at the University of Wollongong (UOW) participate in a specialised program in the final six months of their degree. Elements of this program, in particular the 'elective' component, whereby students may travel overseas, impose a significant financial burden on students. In addition, this component is often conducted outside of an overseas education institution or an overseas campus of an Australian higher education provider. However, such students are ineligible to access the Overseas Higher Education Loan Program (OS-HELP) due to the requirement that a 0.5 Equivalent Full Time Student Load (EFTSL) must remain on completion of overseas study, and be enrolled with an overseas education institution or an overseas campus of an Australian higher education provider. As a result, a portion of students establish expensive loans with financial institutions whilst others unfortunately forfeit the opportunity.

Therefore, the Wollongong University Medical Students' Society supports the following amendments:

- Reduction of the EFTSL that a student must have remaining on completion of the overseas study from 0.5 EFTSL to 0.125 EFTSL.
- Removal of the requirement that students must be enrolled with an overseas education institution or an overseas campus of an Australian higher education provider.

A medical elective allows students to expand their understanding of global healthcare and benefit from disease presentations which are uncommon in Australia. This is particularly important considering Australia's immigrant population and economic reliance on



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overseas visitors. In addition, medical students elect for placements in every corner of the globe which results in a great diversification of the knowledge base. The Society considers medical electives pivotal for professional development.

Stringent EFTSL requirements result in students with mandatory non-traditional study patterns being unable to access OS-HELP. Peers studying Medicine at fellow Australian universities with either flexibility or an elective period within the constraints of the eligibility criteria are able to benefit from this Program. The Society concludes that this disparity does not provide all students with equal opportunity and is therefore discriminatory.

Removing the requirement that a student must enrol with an overseas education institution or an overseas campus of an Australian higher education provider is particularly important for medical electives. The majority of placements are organised directly with hospitals and health clinics. The UOW Graduate School of Medicine has a comprehensive approvals process for electives which will ensure appropriate use of OS-HELP funds. Students will only be granted approval to embark on an elective if proof of concept, safety, learning objectives and personal and professional development goals have been established. The Society considers that the UOW Graduate School of Medicine is in an appropriate position to determine if the proposed elective destination is suitable for the purposes of OS-HELP.

This Bill will remove onerous criteria which prohibit UOW Medical Students accessing OS-HELP, allowing for equal opportunity for professional development. The Society therefore commends the Bill.

The Society would be pleased to appear before a public hearing on this amendment.

Yours Sincerely,

Thomas Niccol

Wollongong University Medical
Students' Society

John Cherry

President
Wollongong University Medical
Students' Society