



## Submission No 2

### **Inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relations with North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia)**

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## **Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

### **Inquiry into Australia's Trade and Investment Relations with North Africa**

**By Dr Andrew Vincent**

*Director, Centre for Middle East and North African Studies, Macquarie University  
President, NSW Chapter, Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry*

#### **Introduction**

The export of education has become Australia's fourth largest export industry. With the declining student numbers from China and South East Asia it is imperative that Australian educational providers find new markets for full fee paying international students. The alternative is a return to the old system of ever-greater government funding for the higher educational sector. North Africa is a potentially lucrative but largely unexploited market for student recruitment. Several significant obstacles prevent the full realization of the potential of this market.

#### **The Problems**

The major obstacle is the classification of all student applicants from the countries of North Africa as Category Four by the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). This classification makes it all but impossible for students to meet the stringent requirements required to obtain a visa. Students from Libya for example, who are fully funded by the Libyan Government, are routinely turned away.

My own university provides a further example. Three years ago Macquarie signed a student exchange agreement with the English speaking and American run al-Akahawayn University in Irfan, Morocco. This is very much an elite institution, attended by some members of the Moroccan royal family. We sent several of our students to Morocco with very positive results, but last year the agreement was cancelled by the other side, as none of al-Akahawayn's students nominated to study at Macquarie had been able to obtain visas.

Macquarie's Vice Chancellor Professor Di Yerbury wrote to DIMIA Minister Vanstone on 20 April 2004 (letter appears as Appendix 2) requesting a special sub-category in the visa regulations to lower the threshold criteria and enable students from al-Akahawayn to meet less prohibitive processing criteria, closer to Category One or Two. Two months later the Vice Chancellor received an off-putting reply not from the Minister herself but

from a mid-level DIMIA functionary who failed completely to address the issues she had raised (see Appendix 3).

The second problem relating to student visas from the countries of North Africa is a purely administrative one. All North African student visa applicants must go through the Australian Embassy Cairo, even though visa-issuing posts in Madrid, Paris, Rome and Malta are often closer and more practical. Morocco for example is over five hours flight from Cairo and political tension between several of the North African countries make the postal services between them unreliable.

### **The Solutions**

DIMIA has based its country risk assessments on a statistical analysis of student overstay rates. When it comes to the countries of North Africa, the statistical base from which these assessments are drawn is so small as to be unrealistic.

Some years ago a similar policy applied to the countries of South America, where all applicants were seen as Category Four, had to apply through the post in Santiago. Grudgingly DIMIA was persuaded to ease the categories and permit visa issue at different posts. South America is now a thriving market for Australian student recruitment.

To ease the situation with regard to students from North Africa I would recommend that the following measures be taken. I would note in passing that these measures in no way detract from Australia's legitimate security concerns about visa applicants from the Middle East and North Africa:

- Government sponsored students (i.e. those whose fees and living costs are borne by their own government) should also be regarded as Category One or Two.
- A subcategory in the visa regulations is established to lower the threshold criteria and enable exchange students from certain nominated universities to meet less prohibitive processing criteria, closer to Category One and Two.
- Administrative regulations should be changed to allow student visa processing to be undertaken in Australian Missions in France, Spain, Italy or Malta as well as in Egypt.

Andrew Vincent (Dr.)

## APPENDIX 1: North Africa – Student Statistics

### 1. International Students Enrolled in Australia, NSW and Macquarie University (TOTALS, ie 2+3)

North Africa	Sem 1 2003	Sem 2 2003	Sem 1 2004	Sem 2 2004	Sem 1 2005
Australia	155	136	182	165	193
New South Wales	97	74	111	90	120
Macquarie	2	1	3	2	2
Market Share	1.3%	0.7%	1.6%	1.2%	1.0%

Source: IDP, Calculations for Market Share made with information from IDP

### 2. International Students Enrolled on Australia, NSW and Macquarie University (ONSHORE)

North Africa	Sem 1 2003	Sem 2 2003	Sem 1 2004	Sem 2 2004	Sem 1 2005
Australia	100	107	128	130	120
New South Wales	47	49	59	64	56
Macquarie	2	1	3	2	2
Market Share	2.0%	0.9%	2.3%	1.5%	1.7%

Source: IDP, Calculations for Market Share made with information from IDP

### 3. International Students Enrolled on Australia, NSW and Macquarie University (OFF-SHORE)

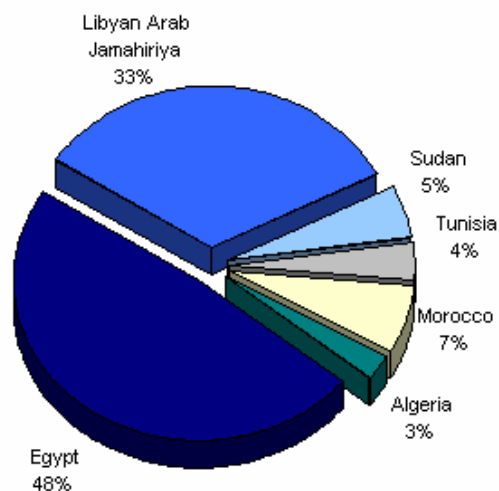
North Africa	Sem 1 2003	Sem 2 2003	Sem 1 2004	Sem 2 2004	Sem 1 2005
Australia	55	29	54	35	73
New South Wales	50	25	52	26	64
Macquarie	0	0	0	0	0
Market Share	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: IDP, Calculations for Market Share made with information from IDP

### 4. International Students from North Africa in Australia (Higher Education, 2004)

North Africa	2003	2004
Algeria	6	4
Egypt	77	77
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	44	53
Sudan	6	8
Tunisia	8	6
Morocco	7	11
Total	148	159

Source: AEI PRISMS (2004)



## **APPENDIX 2: Letter from Di Yerbury to Minister Amanda Vanstone**

04/351

**20 April 2004**

**Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone**

Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

Suite MF 40

Parliament House

Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

As you may know, Macquarie University is becoming one of the most internationalized universities in Australia. We have a steady stream of students from around the world coming to our beautiful campus, and a large number of our own students traveling abroad. Macquarie students are able to take advantage of our many student exchange agreements with sister universities and, with the help of Macquarie Travel Grants, undertake courses for a semester or two which count toward their Macquarie degrees.

We are unique among the universities in Australia in having an exchange agreement with al-Akhawayn University in Irfane, an American-run English language university in Morocco. We have already sent several of our students to Morocco, and would like to send more. Unfortunately our Moroccan partner university has been unsuccessful in obtaining visas for any of their students to spend a semester here at Macquarie, and as a result wish to cancel our agreement.

Although Morocco is Category Four in the Student Visa regulations, the handful of al-Akhawayn students who would come to Macquarie on exchange are of the highest possible calibre. They are from elite families, speak fluent English, and their bona fides are beyond question.

I am writing to you now to see whether it would be possible to make a sub-category in the visa regulations to lower the threshold criteria and enable exchange students from this particular university to meet less prohibitive processing criteria, closer to category one or two. I am confident that if this were done, we could maintain our agreement, and a healthy flow of students would continue to flow in both directions to the mutual benefit of all.

Yours Sincerely,

Di Yerbury,  
Vice-Chancellor

## APPENDIX 3: Letter from DIMIA to Di Yerbury



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

Professor Di Yerbury  
Vice-Chancellor and President  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

VICE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE

cc: John Lorton  
Tony Adams  
25 JUN 2004  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

Dear Professor

Thank you for your letter of 20 April 2004, to the Minister for Immigration Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, concerning lowering student visa requirements for Moroccan citizens. Senator Vanstone has asked that I respond on her behalf.

As you know, country Assessment Levels are based on objective indicators of risk. These indicators apply to all student visa applicants and are designed to ensure consistency and transparency across the student visa program. Within this framework, it is not possible to make the kind of changes you are seeking; however, it may be possible to assist your program in other ways.

Our Cairo post has advised that one of the difficulties with Moroccan cases is communication with the applicant. Moroccan applicants rarely supply or have email addresses, fax numbers are often incorrectly recorded and address details are often illegible. This inability for the post to contact the applicant can extend the normal time taken to process a visa application. Even in recent cases where communications were handled through the Moroccan Embassy in Cairo, delays were experienced with delivery of letters to the students.

The post has advised that they have had contact on several occasions with the Moroccan institution regarding the evidentiary requirements that need to be satisfied to progress a student visa application. Our post is confident that this contact was received positively by the institution and that more applications will be forthcoming.

Another possible visa option for Moroccan citizens wishing to undertake training is the Professional Development Visa (PDV). This is a sponsored visa that caters for groups of foreign professionals, managers and government officials wishing to undertake tailored professional development training in Australia.

PDV visa applicants must have managerial or other professional skills, work experience relevant to the program, and be employed and remunerated by the overseas employer or be nominated by a foreign government agency. The training programs must be academic in nature and should not exceed 12 months in length.

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Should you have problems or queries regarding the progress of any future Moroccan student visa application, please contact Ms Louise Smith, Director Student Policy and Analysis on 6264 4792 ([marie-louise.smith@immi.gov.au](mailto:marie-louise.smith@immi.gov.au)). For further information regarding the PDV please contact Ms Jasmine Cernovs on 6264 1348 ([jasmine.cernovs@immi.gov.au](mailto:jasmine.cernovs@immi.gov.au)).

A copy of your letter and this response has been forwarded to the post.

Yours sincerely



Abul Rizvi  
First Assistant Secretary  
Migration and Temporary Entry Division

22 JUN 2004