

14 March 2013

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Ms Amanda Rishworth MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Education and Employment
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Rishworth

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

I am writing to you on behalf of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) in regard to the Inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Asian Century) Bill 2013, and in particular OS HELP eligibility arrangements.

ACPET is the peak body representing private education and training providers in Australia, with approximately 1,000 members in all States and Territories. ACPET has approximately 100 members delivering higher education throughout Australia. According to the recent Grattan Institute analysis of higher education, in Australia there are approximately 59,000 equivalent full time students currently enrolled in non-university higher education courses.

Non university higher education providers form a very diverse group of specialised institutions. ACPET's higher education members deliver degrees in the fields of theology, business, information technology, natural therapies, hospitality, management, teaching, health, law, design, accounting, multi-media, music and linguistics. Approximately half of Australia's non self accrediting institutions are approved under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* as FEE HELP providers.

The OS HELP loan scheme is currently available to undergraduate students enrolled in a Commonwealth Supported Place who want to undertake some of their study overseas. The proposed amendments outlined in the Higher Education Support Amendment (Asian Century) Bill 2013 will extend eligibility arrangements to post graduate students. However given that Commonwealth Supported Places are only available within public universities (with some minor exceptions) the proposed eligibility guidelines will continue to mean that students who are enrolled in a non university higher education provider, either at undergraduate or post graduate level, will be ineligible to access OS HELP.

The Commonwealth Government established the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to ensure that the Government and other stakeholders can have confidence in all higher education providers. ACPET believes that the establishment of TEQSA with its enhanced regulatory powers provides the Commonwealth with the opportunity to extend the eligibility of OS HELP to students enrolled in non university higher education providers with full confidence that the institutions are delivering a quality education.

Currently some non university higher education providers do provide the option for students to broaden and deepen their knowledge in particular fields of study through enrolment in overseas higher education institutions or to undertake internships in overseas enterprises. However given the prohibitive cost of the overseas study not all students are able to take up these options without assistance. Unfortunately the current OS HELP eligibility requirements mean that they are unable to access the financial assistance that students in public universities are able to access. The Hon. Chris Bowen, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research stated in the second reading speech for this Bill that the amendments intend to “assist more students to undertake a wider variety of study related activities.” ACPET welcomes the intention of the Bill but takes the opportunity to highlight that it provides no assistance to higher education students outside of the university sector. This Inquiry provides the opportunity to rectify this unjust situation.

Full fee paying students at non university higher education providers, whether by upfront payments or FEE HELP, are already severely financially disadvantaged when compared to Commonwealth Supported Place students as they do not have their tuition fees subsidised. Therefore we believe these students should at least be subject to equitable treatment and have the same eligibility to access OS HELP as a Commonwealth Supported Place student.

Accordingly we ask that the Standing Committee on Education and Employment recommend that this Bill be amended to allow students enrolled in a TEQSA Registered non university higher education provider to also be eligible to access OS HELP. This will provide all higher education students with the same opportunity to engage with the region and beyond, which in turn introduces new skills and thinking to the Australian economy and helps to enrich our society as a whole.

I would be pleased to meet with the Committee to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Field
Chief Executive Officer