

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2006-2007 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** 3  
**Output Group:** 3.3

#### **DEST Question No. E783\_07**

Senator Carr provided in writing.

#### **Question:**

International student graduates' English proficiency

I refer you to the recent publicity about a piece by Professor Bob Birrell of Monash University.

1. Have you had discussions with Professor Birrell about his research – that shows that a third of international students graduating from Australian universities do not have a standard of English good enough to hold down a professional job in Australia?
2. Isn't the problem, identified by Professor Birrell, that universities can and do admit international students who are issued on-shore visas, because they have undertaken prior study in Australia? That study might be secondary school, English language or TAFE study – is that right?
3. However, of universities admit students on this basis, they are not required to apply any further English testing – is that correct?
4. Have you commissioned any research or studies of your own on this issue? Please provide details.
5. Have you formed a plan to tackle this issue? What are you going to do about it?
6. What do you think are the implications for the Australian international education industry of this problem – the problem that a third of international graduates from our universities have not acquired the English skills that will enable them to work professionally anywhere in the world?

#### **Answer:**

*International student graduates' English proficiency*

1. Yes.

However, it should be noted that Dr Birrell's research pertains only to those graduating international students from higher education and vocational education and training sectors who had applied for permanent residency as a skilled migrant in 2005-06. This constitutes approximately one sixth of the graduating international student cohort.

2. Dr Birrell contends that there is a problem with graduating international students, that a proportion of them do not meet International English Language Testing System (IELTS) level 6.0. The Department is looking at all aspects of an international students' learning experience from entry requirements, support throughout a course and upon graduation, i.e. the overall student experience. The Department is also checking the data and conclusions of Dr Birrell. A portion of international students enter higher education

through pathways, this could include secondary schooling, an English language course, vocational education and training or a foundation programme.

3. Yes. Universities are self accrediting and are responsible for ensuring that international students have a sufficient level of English language competency to complete their course of study.
4. The Department is currently reviewing the issue. No research has been commissioned to date.
5. The Department is currently reviewing the data from which Dr Birrell draws his conclusions to determine the nature of the issue and any action required.
6. The “problem” as stated in the question is inaccurate. As a whole the higher education international student cohort has not had their English language competency tested on graduation.

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