

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 19 OCTOBER 2010

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(137) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration

Senator Fifield asked:

(1) What consultation did the Department undertake with the higher education industry and vocational education providers as to how the new requirements would affect them?

Answer:

Several new initiatives in the Student visa program were introduced in 2010. These include an increase in living cost requirements and a change to course packaging arrangements.

The Department co-Chairs a biannual forum of education peak body representatives including Australian Council of Private Education and Training, Australian Universities International Directors Forum, Council of Private Higher Education, International Education Association of Australia, ISANA International Education Association, National Catholic Education Commission, TAFE Directors Australia and Universities Australia named the *Government Industry Stakeholder Consultation (GISC)*. At the November 2009 meeting of the GISC, the Department provided an overview of the policy initiatives and projects that were underway. These included the implementation of Visa Application Charge (VAC) exemptions for students affected by college closures and an increase in living costs for visa application purposes, which both became effective on 1 January 2010.

It was noted that the yearly rate for living costs of \$12,000 would increase to \$18,000, approximate to that required by domestic students.

The representatives of the peak education provider bodies accepted that \$12,000 per year for living costs was not sufficient. At the time, representatives suggested that the Department provide a better explanation of the rationale behind the increased living costs figure to assist education providers in explaining these costs to prospective international students. The fact sheets on the living costs and VAC free initiatives, which were available on the Department's website, were provided to attendees for feedback.

At the meeting in November 2009 it was noted that the Department would be looking at course packaging arrangements with regard to visa subclasses. Given that the course packaging arrangements were subject to high level Government agreement, notification to the broader educational community could not be undertaken in the timeframe.

Prior to the course packaging arrangements coming into effect in March 2010, representatives of education peak bodies were contacted by telephone to notify them of the imminent implementation of the initiative. Representatives were appreciative of this and understood the sensitivity of the measure prior to agreement by Government.