

Submission template

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If you consider that information in your submission should be treated as confidential, or if you wish to remain anonymous please clearly indicate this in your submission or in a cover note and provide reasons for your request.

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The template reflects the terms of reference for the review and the issues identified in the issues paper. Please refer to the issues paper and terms of reference for more information.

A field for general comments has been included below for you to raise additional issues.

Written submissions are to be received by 30 October 2009 and sent by email to:
esosreview@deewr.gov.au.

About you:

Institution / organisation

Name:

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY, PERTH. WA (ECU) STUDENT GUILD

Sector:

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS COUNCIL, EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

Prepared by:

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Contact details:

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Student / individual

Name:

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Institution / organisation:

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Course / role:

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Home Country:
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Supporting the interests of students

i. How can the quality and accessibility of reliable information be improved? What role can ESOS have in ensuring providers and their agents are held to account for supplying prospective and current international students with accurate and timely information?

Comments

It is an undeniable fact that some education providers often furnish very attractive information to prospective international students in order to lure them to apply to study in their institutions. However, the real experience sometimes on the ground is often nothing to write home about. A number of Australian education providers provide web sites for searching accommodation to their international students either before they arrive or upon arrival. Most international students think these accommodations are readily available once they are in the country. To their surprise, some spend more than two months in backpackers since they could not find any affordable decent accommodation.

It does happen sometimes that some of the listed landlords and landladies on the web site decline to offer their rented premises to some international students for reasons best known to them.

The information package pertaining to accommodation is the most notorious offender as regards misinformation in the entire education package prepared by most Australian institutions.

Sometimes, few institutions also include information on academic programs which have since been phased out or integrated in a different program of studies, yet these are often not updated accordingly. Students arrive only to discover that they are obliged to change the course of studies they were initially admitted for. The worse scenario is the fact that in the course of studies, sometimes academic programs are re branded or re structured and a course that would have lasted for example for 2 semesters, suddenly becomes 2 and 1/2 semester program and this hit hard international students. Most of them live on strict budgets and have difficulty managing the extra cost of an additional unplanned semester.

Recommendation/s

Quality and accessibility of reliable information for international students can be improved and sustained if the educational providers as a matter of urgency are requested to reedit their respective information packages for prospective international students and resubmit them to the DEEWR for study and approval. DEEWR would involve some current international students already studying in Australia to be part of the group that will evaluate the submitted information packages from education providers. They are better placed to ascertain what information is misleading and

what is not.

ESOS can put in place specific Acts that will require the monitoring of the activities of recruitment offices of education providers through regular request of the institutions to submit their information packages to DEEWR for checks. It can also legislate the mandatory online survey of international students to evaluate the fit between education provider's information package provided to them in their countries of origin or online and their real experience since they arrived in their respective institutions. These evaluations can help inform the DEEWR about shortfalls of some education providers as regards accurate and timely information and also serve as viable resource for dialogue between DEEWR and education providers.

ii. How should the Australian Government and the international education sector protect international students if a provider closes? How should this be resourced?

Comments

This is an unfortunate event that should not happen... Yes, we heard of some cases of such closures in the Eastern States of the country. Such situations only jeopardize the academic dream of many gifted international students, who find themselves stranded because they have paid fully to these institutions and have no more money to enrol elsewhere in Australia to pursue their studies... It is a grave concern that must be addressed.

Recommendation/s

If there are checks and balances in place to monitor each education provider on semester basis, especially; as regards the fit between the resources and facilities being advertised and the real resources and facilities on campus in addition to the regular online survey of international students about services and experience in their respective institutions, such sudden closure of institutions for gross inefficiency will be a thing of the past.

iii. Are different mechanisms needed to support international students to resolve complaints effectively? Are additional complaint mechanisms needed?

Comments

Often some international students feel intimidated to openly come forward and make complaints about their unsavoury situations in their accommodation facility, in the lecture room or even on campus or in respect of academic work and evaluation.

They feel they will be targeted by the persons against whom they have complained. Hence many just keep quiet and suffer alone.

Sometimes, some of them also ignore the channels of redress that are available to them and as result, continue to suffer injustice or discrimination silently.

Recommendation/s

I think each campus of an institution should have besides the usual channels for redressing students' (international and national) complaints a special desk for international students' complaints. Those who will man this desk should comprise not

only seasoned local Australian staff with experience in working with non-Australian students, but also former international students who are now staff of the institution plus few volunteering international students studying on that particular campus. The desk should have both male and female contact persons to address sometimes, cultural and religious sensitive situations. NB. Some Muslim young men will normally not approach a female staff for redress or for an assistance no matter how much he might have been in need of the counsel or the assistance of that officer.

Furthermore, a 12 or 24 hour desk for international students' concerns (and not just for complaints) should be created in every local government office/city office to provide on the spot advice and assistance to International students who needed help in any domain and have failed to secure this from their respective institutions.

iv. Should an international student's ability to change their education provider be limited, if so in what way?

Comments

Sometimes this might be necessary hence there is the need for some flexibility in this domain.

It should be possible for an international student to change the education provider after arrival if the student discovered that certain conditions of his admission were not being met by the original provider and for no fault of his or her.

Recommendation/s

Once it is established through DEEWR and the office responsible for the compliance of ESOS that an international student has not been offered what he or she bargained for at the admission, the said student should be free to change education provider immediately and when necessary, there should be some form of indemnity or reimbursement of some funds already paid.

This change of provider should not be limited to a semester or a year as the more such an anomaly lasted, the more it becomes difficult for the international student to find an alternate institution/provider and also save sufficient funds for the additional academic and living costs.

Delivering quality as the cornerstone of Australian education

v. How can the intersection between ESOS and the underpinning education quality assurance frameworks be improved?

Comments

Quality education is the hallmark for any country that prides itself as leader in academic research and education endeavours.

Whatever promotes quality education should be encouraged. I personally, cannot complain about the quality of my education in Edith Cowan University, as I am so fortunate to have two highly gifted and experienced professors as my supervisors (from the School of Education) and have a supporting Graduate Research School that really cares for, promotes and sustains the academic endeavours of its students.

This might not be the case elsewhere nor could it be the experience of all PhD candidates at Edith Cowan University. Consequently, there is the need for evolving other means for promoting and ensuring quality education.

Recommendation/s

If the current frameworks could be subcategorised into two: Simplified critical items and General Compliance items.

The simplified highly critical/crucial items will constitute the conditions and services whose absence or poor delivery (even in one domain/item) suffices to compromise the guarantee of quality assurance.

The general compliance items will constitute the other broad-based compliance items that are already in vogue whose absence or poor delivery do not necessarily compromise the guarantee of education quality but reduces the general efficacy of the education program most especially by comparison to other efficient quality education providers.

Even though it might be complex to decide on what really constitute critical/crucial item for ensuring education quality, this is possible provided the education providers themselves are engaged in this discussion... i.e. ... on what constitute the first three or four, ... crucial items for ensuring education quality in their own institutions.

vi. Where do international students' needs differ to other students, such that additional or different regulation is required?

Comments

International students no matter how open minded they may be, no matter how well they may try to integrate with the Aussie community remain foreigners and some times do feel the need to communicate with some one from their own country of origin or with some one who is more sympathetic towards their peculiar situation as international students especially regarding individual welfare issues; health, monetary, academic, relational and accommodation difficulties.

No matter how sympathetic the Aussie staff may be, once he or she has to combine dealing with local Australian students and international students at the same place and at the same time, some times, these staff are tempted to stereotype the cases they handle, especially with regards to international students, for no fault of theirs. They are simply being inundated by the volume of work, inquiries and answers to provide at a go and would not have the energy nor the time to personally analyse and assess each individual international student enquiry on its own basis and merit.

For example, as regards accommodation, most international students are at a loss in finding the right accommodation and negotiating the right terms or seeking relief when abused by unscrupulous landlords or landladies. Local Australian students, thanks to their home experience, even if they arrive from the regional areas still would usually find their way out with less mistakes. Why? This is so, because they can always and easily call on fellow Australian students after lectures or at the gym for an assistance or for an advice, a situation that international students are found wanting. They feel less at ease to communicate with their Australian student colleagues on personal welfare issues.

Another example is the difficult integration of international students into the Australian society. Some international students have difficulty speaking to their lecturers or to

even ask questions during or after lectures. Some feel their oral English is not good enough for asking questions during lectures. Others feel shy and intimidated speaking with or to their Aussie students who keep asking them "I don't understand your accent..." etc. So, they keep all their probing/clarifying questions to themselves and this affects the academic progress of even the very intelligent students.

Recommendation/s

There should be a regulation indicating the importance of creating on each campus, special international student services that are "tailored" to the sensitivities and the peculiarities of international students. These could be services for accommodation, for the help of academic mentors, and other welfare issues.

Effective regulation

vii. Is ESOS compliance and enforcement adequate?

Comments

In its current form, there are less severe penalties for non compliance on the part of education providers.

Further, the absence of semester based check on education providers on their compliance to the terms of ESOS does encourage some education providers to become less rigorous in complying to ESOS requirements.

Recommendation/s

ESOS should put in place a system that will require at least a half yearly evaluation of the compliance of education providers to the terms of ESOS. Furthermore, results from our proposed mandatory online survey of international students on the services of and their experience in their respective institutions should serve as possible data for calling the recalcitrant education providers to book or at least for giving them some formal warning.

viii. Can risk be better addressed through strengthening registration requirements and/or better targeting of compliance and enforcement action? How else can risk be managed?

Comments

Yes, risk will be better managed and addressed seriously through stronger sanctions for non-compliance on the part of education providers.

Recommendation/s

Clear-cut conditions that will attract a sanction of suspension or revocation of an education provider's license should be spelt out in the ESOS. One of these conditions could be the regular failure of an institution to provide more than 75% of what it proposes in its information package to international students abroad or online. The survey of international students on semester basis on their respective institutions

could inform DEEWR about those institutions which regularly fail to live up to expectation and DEEWR can investigate these further for a possible disciplinary action.

ix. What should be the balance between a focus on inputs and prescription versus outcomes?

Comments

Recommendation/s

x. How can ESOS better support Australia's student visa program?

Comments

Student visa holders are limited to work for only 20 hours a week. This is too limited as most gifted international students can study very well and perform highly in their respective academic endeavours even they work for more than 20 hours a week. Students who do not do well, be they international students or local students, often have more time management problems than intelligence related problems. A student who is poor in managing time will still perform poorly, even if he or she works for only five or ten hours a week.

Recommendation/s

So, I propose that all international students who are in their second semester of study and have produced satisfactory academic outcome, should be permitted automatically to work for any number of hours as local Australian students do. The idea is any international student who passes successfully his or her first semester examinations or assignments is capable of maintaining the standard except that he/she has lost contact with the purpose of his/her being in Australia.

ESOS should mandate education providers to use their discretion in limiting the number of hours of work per week in respect of students who constantly under perform yet spend most of their time at working to earn money or volunteering.

Sustainability of the international education sector

xi. What role should ESOS have in supporting the ongoing sustainability of the international education sector given the challenges it faces into the future?

Comments

The ESOS Act is a useful tool for ensuring some decency and compliance on the part of both the education providers and international students. It does serve as a crucial tool for protecting the rights, privileges and responsibilities of both the education providers and international students.

Recommendation/s

The ESOS Act should enact laws that will require a periodic review of the conditions for registering education providers so that these conditions can be reviewed in the light of new developments and issues that might not have been catered for or anticipated in the prevailing terms of registration.

ESOS Act should also mandate a body which periodically ascertains the level of compliance of education providers to the terms of their registration through direct communication with randomly selected international students from different educational institutions in the country.

General Comments

The ESOS review is a great opportunity offered by the Commonwealth Government of Australia to revisit crucial issues that militate presently against the quality 'health' of the relationship between education providers and international students in Australia. For this I think all international students, at least; those I represent in Edith Cowan University, Perth are most grateful.

However, it should be noted that each of the points mentioned here do not necessarily represent my personal ideas and views only; some are based on comments by and experiences of other international students who live in Perth, Western Australia and study in Edith Cowan University.

I hope these points will be given a serious consideration.

Some ECU International students are still putting together other points for submission to the Commission. Once this is collated they will be forwarded directly to the Commission before the 30th October 2009 deadline.

Thanks and best of luck in your great efforts to help redress through the ESOS review the numerous problems many international students have been grappling with for many years.

Thank you.