

Response to the review of the Education for Overseas Students (ESOS) act

The response of ICMS covers three areas,

- The regulation of international education under the ESOS act;
- The regulation and quality assurance of the private higher education sector and;
- The de-coupling of immigration from education.

Regulation and quality assurance in the private sector

The private sector in Australia covers a wide classification of training institutions, from institutions offering short courses, to technical and trade training colleges, through to institutions, such as ICMS, that match universities in their offerings. *There is currently no clear differentiation or classification of types of institutions across the sector.*

We believe that this has contributed to the current international student crisis in two ways. Firstly, it has lead to confusion in the international market about the kind of institution they are choosing and the level of education that is offered by them. Secondly, it has made all institutions, no matter the quality of program they offer vulnerable to the nefarious actions of a few lower-end Colleges. We would argue that, without a proper and effective classification system across private providers the public has no way of discriminating between the different capabilities and levels of providers.

We would also argue that, in order to foster a high quality private education sector, in order to provide international students with the tools with which they can choose their private education provider and in order to protect of the industry that there needs to be ongoing and official recognition that not all private institutions are equal and that some are, in fact, closer to university status, than to the other colleges with which they are grouped.

We would envision the introduction of a tiered system of private education involving strict accreditation processes and clear labeling of institutions. We would also argue that these different levels of provider be heavily publicised in order to foster wise decision-making by our international students. This accreditation, auditing and classification would not only chase-out the unsuitable providers from the system but would also be clear indicators of the type of institution and education provider.

The ESOS Act

Whilst the ESOS act provides sometimes onerous and overbearing regulations, it is of our opinion that compliance with the act is not sufficiently audited, particularly in the private education sector. We would argue for an auditing and quality review process to be validated it should be coupled with the accreditation and classification process and system described above. In addition, the ESOS act should also be expanded to ensure good business practices are maintained and that long-term sustainability of private providers forms part of the approval criteria, particularly new providers.

Immigration and education

It is the view of ICMS that the coupling of immigration and education has brought short-term benefits to a few providers to the long term detriment of the sector as a whole. We call for the decoupling of the immigration and education especially where third parties take on both roles.