



Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024

UTS Students' Association International Collective Review

On 24 May 2024, the Bills Digest for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024 was released, and this bill consists of 8 Parts that the federal government plans to introduce in the ESOS for future international students and Australian Universities. Thus, at the University of Technology Sydney Students' Association, the International Collective gathered various testimonials from international students regarding the bill and asked for their perspectives on the pros and cons of the bill for future international students.

Below are the seven main topics covered mainly by the international students at UTS, their opinions on the bill, and how the government can look at a few areas from a different perspective. We have also given some examples as students were facing those issues, and it would be beneficial for the government to look into these topics through the examples as they will give a better perspective to the inquiry.

1. Structured Regulatory Body

Testimonial:

"There should be a well-planned and structured regulatory body for the decisions governed by the government and with the involvement of the education minister, etc., to have a well-discussed decision rather than giving the whole power to a minister as it will become the case of Canada where there were talks for deporting 700 students back to their country due to mismanagement of the government and immigration system."

Explanation:

The bill centralises significant decision-making power with the Minister for Education. While this aims to streamline processes, students' express concerns about potential mismanagement, citing the example of Canada. A more structured and inclusive regulatory body involving multiple stakeholders, including the education minister, students' body and industry experts, could ensure well-considered and transparent decisions. This collaborative approach could prevent costly policy changes, ensuring stability and trust in the system.

Source - <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/admission-scams-push-indian-international-students-canada>

2. Regulation of Education Agents

Testimonial:

"In the agent and commission section - There are a few of my friends who are involving agents when transferring money from their home country because when my friend wants to bring money from his home country, he transfers the money through an agent and then the agent sends the money to the bank account of the student in Australia."

Explanation:

The role of education agents in financial transactions highlights the need for better regulation and oversight. The bill addresses the issue of education agents but could further focus on financial practices to prevent exploitation. Establishing a government-regulated system to monitor agents and their transactions could protect students from potential fraud and financial abuse, ensuring a safer and more transparent process for managing their finances.

3. Verification and Regulation of Agents

Testimonial:

"Having the data of agents at the government and the government regulating the agent will help reduce the bad practices done by the agents, and we should also be able to see who have verified agents on the Australian Gov site, so we are not scammed in future."

Explanation:

Students advocate for a transparent and accessible verification system for education agents. The bill's focus on improving the quality and integrity of the sector could be strengthened by requiring agents to be listed and verified by the government. This would help students make informed choices and avoid scams. Publicly accessible data on verified agents would promote accountability and trust within the system, aligning with the bill's objectives.

4. Relevance of Courses

Testimonial:

"The universities are introducing courses that are not of any logic because saying that one university in Sydney city has a course Master of Science in Biomedical Engineering where the master's does not make any sense. It's neither science nor engineering as they are different, and a student can't apply to a skill shortage as these master's don't fall under any specific area."

Explanation:

Students are concerned about the relevance and practicality of some courses offered. The bill's provisions regulating course registrations could address this by ensuring that new courses meet industry standards and labour market needs.

Universities should design programs that align with clear career pathways and skills shortages, providing students with valuable qualifications. This would enhance the employability of graduates and the overall quality of education.

5. Benefits of Enrolment Caps

Testimonial:

"Having a cap at some point will help the international students because due to the overload of international students and domestic students, the subjects get allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, and sometimes the core subjects get filled, and students have to either change the subject or take it in the next semester."

Explanation:

As proposed in the bill, enrolment caps could help manage class sizes and ensure students have access to essential courses. Overcrowding can lead to competition for spots in required classes, delaying graduation and impacting the quality of education. By limiting enrolments, universities can better allocate resources, maintain high standards of teaching, and ensure that students can complete their studies as planned. This policy could support a more sustainable and efficient education system.

6. Course Availability in Regional Universities

Testimonial:

"I would also encourage the regional universities to have the same courses as the universities in the cities so International Students can see other universities if the cap is filled in the desired universities for an international student."

Explanation:

This point addresses the need for equitable access to education across different geographical locations. The bill allows the Minister to limit enrolments by provider, course, or location, which could lead to caps in famous urban universities. To mitigate this, the government could incentivise regional universities to offer the same courses as their urban counterparts. This would provide international students with more options and reduce pressure on city-based institutions, supporting balanced growth in the education sector and promoting regional development.

7. Consultation with International Students

Testimonial:

"Referring to 8 parts of the Bills digest, I would say that ministers should understand international students and should consider consulting with international students to get a better perspective."

Explanation:

International students emphasise the importance of ministers understanding their unique challenges and perspectives. The bill introduces new Ministerial powers to regulate education providers and courses, yet students believe these decisions should not be made in isolation. By consulting international students, the government can ensure that policies reflect the real needs and concerns of those directly affected, potentially leading to more effective and supportive measures. This consultation could enhance the bill's aim to improve the quality and integrity of the international education sector by incorporating diverse viewpoints into policymaking.

Conclusion

The testimonials from international students at UTS provide valuable insights into the potential impacts of the Overseas Student Amendment Bill 2024. By addressing their concerns through consultation, equitable course availability, structured regulation, agent oversight, course relevance, and managed enrolments, the bill can better enhance the quality and integrity of Australia's international education sector.

Yours Sincerely,

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Date – 24 June 2024, Time – 14:00hrs